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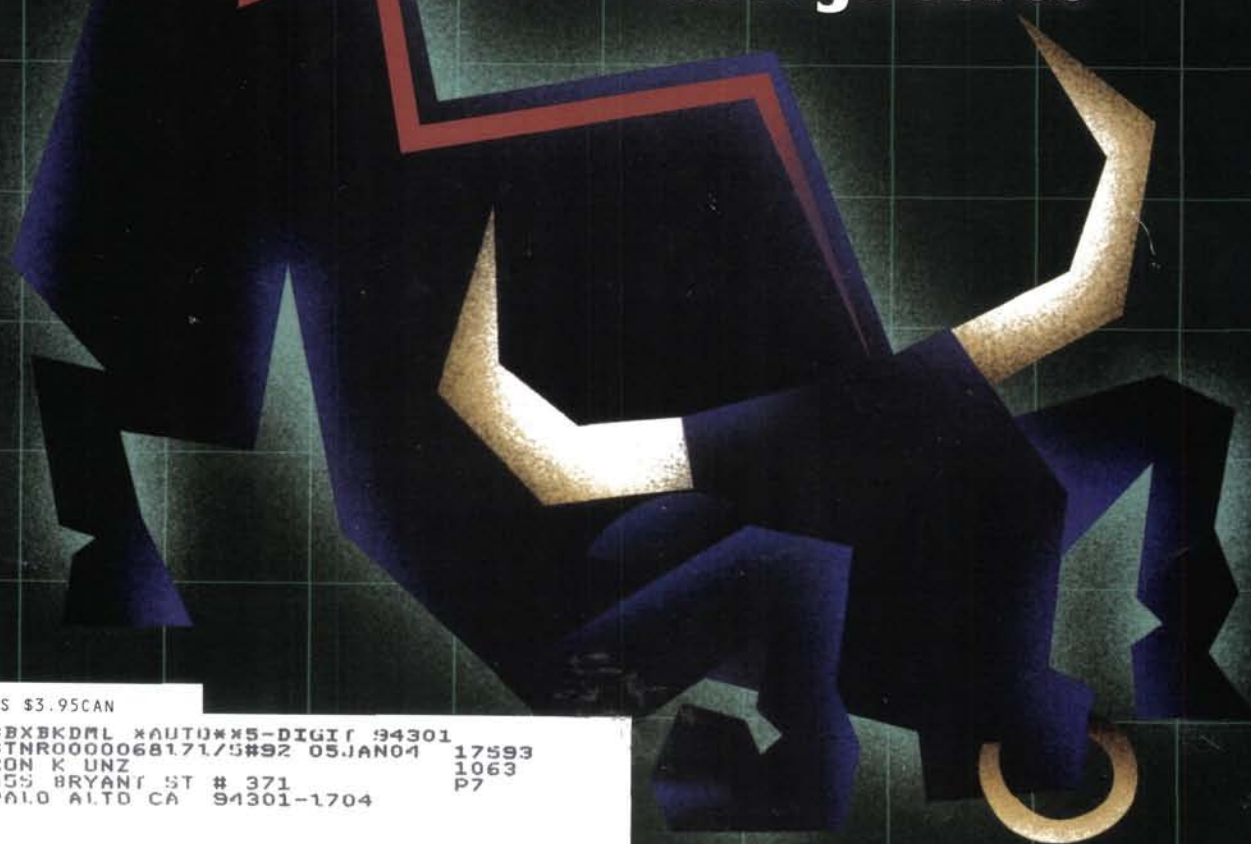

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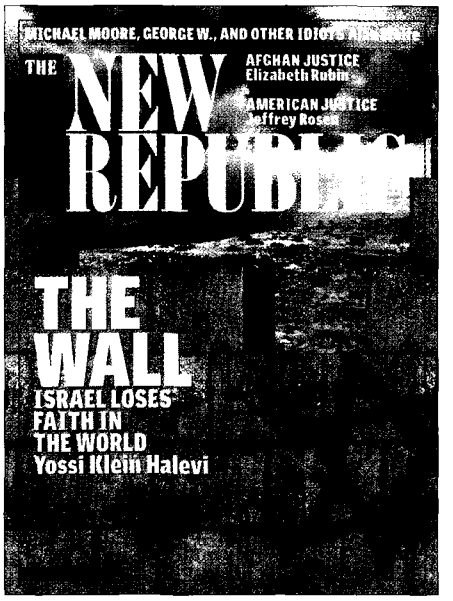
Lifeblood

TO THE EDITORS:

Near the end of her thoughtful and eloquent review of my book *Christ: A Crisis in the Life of God*, Paula Fredriksen writes, almost regretfully, "[Jack] Miles is wrong. The ancient slaughter [of the Jews by the Romans] *did* fail to raise the same sorts of 'radical or desperate questions about God' that the twentieth-century slaughter raised, because ancient people are not modern people, and they thought about things differently" ("Like Father, Like Son," March 18). Did they? In the ancient Jewish commentary on the Book of Lamentations called *Eikhah Rabbah*, God is heard to cry out, with reference to himself, "Woe to the King who succeeds in His youth and fails in His old age!" Alan Mintz, in *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature*, comments: "The new presence in the text as read by the Rabbis is divine pathos. Transformed at the moment of the Destruction, the figure of God switches from the monitory enforcer of punishment to the dazed sufferer whose suffering derives in part from His *own* pain over the loss of His children and in part from His empathy with their affliction. The Destruction is a cosmic event that is a catastrophe for God as well as man."

When the Rabbis placed God himself in this desperate condition, they raised, I submit, a desperate question about God, and it's not unreasonable to see in the Christian myth of the suffering God the same question raised in a different but related way. In the Jews who wrote *Eikhah Rabbah*, this new divine pathos, this trembling near-repentance, competed, to be sure, with a far more frequent reassertion of unrelenting divine justice. Divine pathos and divine vindictiveness competed as well in the Jews who wrote the Gospel, but something new had made a first appearance under the impact of the same catastrophe. Fredriksen is wrong when she says, "The old paradigm ... worked fine for them." No, the old paradigm struggled in them with a new paradigm whose first emergence did not require the twentieth century.

I agree unhesitatingly that "it is our world, not the world of antiquity, that provides the generative elements of Miles's story, and the moral and cultural context that gives it power." What makes any work of literature a classic is its capacity to provoke successive worlds, successive moral and cultural contexts, to endow it with



new power by exploiting or flaunting some neglected or repressed aspect of it. There is and must be an element of parti pris in this process. I concede in my book "that the reading offered here—a latter-day Gospel harmony—is literary and imaginative rather than historical, and therefore that it is inevitably subjective: the close reading of no more than a modest set of Gospel passages selected to bring a particular interpretive option into high relief." At the same time the historical digressions that, in Fredriksen's eyes, "confuse [my] enterprise" are as legitimate here as historical digressions in a historical novel. The Roman *shoah* and the Nazi *shoah* are by no means twin events (the population figures I quote, by the way, are not mine but those of Salo Baron in *Encyclopedia Judaica*), yet thinking about either can direct our attention to neglected aspects of the literature associated with the other. Do "poor historical analogies just get in the way?" Sure, sometimes; but sometimes what historical analogies disrupt is rigid historiographical compartmentalization. The present can teach as much about the past as the past about the present.

JACK MILES
The Getty Center
Los Angeles, California

PAULA FREDRIKSEN REPLIES:

Sequence matters, in history as in science. A cause must precede its effect. So: Yes, the Gospels are written in the wake of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E.; yes, they speak (variously) about a savior figure (not "God") who suffers; yes, a pacifist ethic is bound up with the declaration of this redemptive figure's story. But all these salient elements of the gospels antedate them by one or two generations. Their earliest appearance comes in the letters of Paul. Paul was a contemporary of Jesus of Nazareth. He joined the early movement in the mid-30s of our era. His letters date from mid-century. Paul died never knowing that Rome would destroy Jerusalem. Ergo, Miles is (again) wrong when he states that "something new [i.e., the Christian message] ... made a first appearance under the impact of the same catastrophe [i.e., Jerusalem's destruction]." The "something new" precedes that catastrophe by at least 20 years. The catastrophe, therefore, cannot have caused it.

Context matters, in historical fiction as in history. Thus, in historical fiction, digressions into actual history enrich the reader's appreciation and understanding of the story, but the fiction tells us only incidentally about the history, and it is not obliged to do more. Outside of the play, Shakespeare's Antony's funeral speech did not cause the historical Brutus's reversal of fortune. The (latter) fiction cannot have caused the (prior) event, both because of the necessary sequence of cause and effect and because something that never happened and that could not possibly have happened cannot have made something *actually* happen. True of Shakespeare's fiction and ancient Roman politics; true of Miles's fiction and ancient Christian origins.

Is this "rigid historiographical compartmentalization"? I think it is, rather, simple and necessary discernment. Identifying causes, detecting consequences, sorting out what really happened from what might have happened from what could not possibly have happened is what we do when we do history. Historical fiction can be history-like; good historical writing avails itself of techniques used in good storytelling. But fiction is not history, and history is not fiction.

Miles's closing salvo is eloquent. But is it true? Does it even make sense? The present teaches us, mostly, about ourselves. It teaches us about the past only to the degree that our enhanced self-awareness can keep us alert to anachronism, the first and last enemy of the historian. The past, finally, teaches us about the present much more than the present can ever teach us about the past. This is so because, outside of science fiction, time flows in one direction only, cause precedes effect, and who and what we have been determines who we are in ways that who we are can never change who we have been. ■

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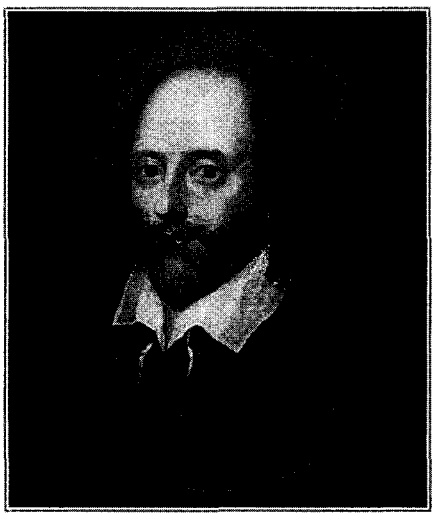

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PETER SACCIO (Ph.D., Princeton University) is Leon D. Black Professor of Shakespearean Studies at Dartmouth College, where he has taught since 1966. He has won Dartmouth's J. Kenneth Huntington Memorial Award for Outstanding Teaching. He is the author of *Shakespeare's English Kings* (1977), a recognized classic in its field. Professor Saccio is also a trained actor. He has performed the Shakespearean roles of Casca, Angelo, Bassanio, and Henry IV, and has directed productions of *Twelfth Night*, *Macbeth*, and *Cymbeline*.

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TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

First Serve

THE DEMOCRATS HAVE gotten their wish: We're smack in the middle of a full-blown "national dialogue" about war with Iraq. But because the Democrats won't take a position, they're not part of it. And as a result, the two most influential anti-war arguments aren't coming from the left. The first is anti-war realism, articulated by such latter-day wise men as Brent Scowcroft and Zbigniew Brzezinski. The realists revere strategy and hate moralism. And so last week, in a series of op-eds, they insisted that an invasion could have unforeseen consequences; that there are no good guys in that part of the world; and that everything is moving too fast.

But there is another emerging anti-war argument, which embraces moralism and ignores strategy. It's populist rather than highbrow, less about policy than about credibility. In recent weeks more and more Iraq doves have said you can't be legitimately pro-war unless you've gone to war yourself.

Partly, of course, the argument is a legacy of Vietnam when the American elite famously absented itself from service. But in Vietnam most of the anti-war activists didn't fight and didn't venerate those who did. And they viewed the military as pro-war, perhaps inherently so. So it made little sense for the anti-war movement to argue that the only people morally qualified to judge the war were those in uniform. Today, however, America's military leaders are widely viewed—in Colin Powell's preferred phrase—as "reluctant warriors." Key members of the military brass opposed going to war in Kuwait in 1991, Bosnia in 1994, and Kosovo in 1999.

But in civil-military terms, those conflicts were mere preludes to today's debate over Iraq, in which the standard journalistic narrative depicts a cautious military locked in bureaucratic battle against a zealous civilian leadership. In this battle, however, the military cannot publicly criticize its civilian bosses. And this muzzling has presented some anti-war commentators with an opportunity. By casting themselves as the indirect tribunes of America's fighting men, they have evaded the problem that traditionally afflicts doves: the problem of looking soft and unpatriotic.

To the contrary, they have thrown the charge back at their hawkish interlocutors—a bit of ideological jujitsu that may prove one of the anti-war movement's most effective tactics. Nebraska Senator Chuck Hagel, mocking President George W. Bush's hawkish head of the Defense Policy Board, suggested last week, "Maybe Mr. [Richard] Perle would like to be in the first wave of those who go into Baghdad." Earlier this year *The New York Times*' Frank Rich explained that "media bloviators [for whom] wartime sacrifice is even more of an abstraction" want to send "someone else's children" to Iraq. And *Newsday* columnist James P. Pinkerton this month warned that "the GOP is being stampeded into foreign war by armchair militarists." It's a little strange to hear a newspaper columnist denouncing opinions offered from armchairs, but Pinkerton and other anti-war pundits see no contradiction. They cannot be armchair doves because in their minds they are channeling the U.S. military.

The ad hominem anti-war argument reflects the times in another way as well. It is the political extension of America's ever-increasing obsession with authenticity. That obsession has long been a feature of the far left, which has argued that since whites cannot understand the experience of blacks, they have no legitimate role in the debate over racial preferences, and that since men cannot understand the experience of women, they have no legitimate role in the debate over abortion. But in recent years authenticity exclusion has migrated to the center. And so, for instance, proponents of agricultural subsidies belittled critics of this spring's farm bill as prissy urbanites with no moral standing to deny aid to Americans who live on the land.

The authenticity argument contains a grain of truth. Obviously an experience—be it of racism, farming, or war—can provide insight into the policy debates surrounding it. But the key word is insight. Experience carries weight only to the degree that it produces better arguments. Sometimes it does not—because personal experience is too narrow and idiosyncratic to shed light on broad debates. And sometimes the most important insights come secondhand, from studying the multiple experiences of others.

In fact, over and over during the '90s, the generals with firsthand battlefield experience guessed wrong—and the civilians without it guessed it right—about what would happen when the United States went to war. Before the Gulf war, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell—who had spent his life in uniform—said war with Iraq would prove too costly. He was overridden by Defense Secretary Dick Cheney, who once infamously told a reporter that he "had other priorities in the '60s than military service." In 1992 Powell wrote a *New York Times* op-ed warning against U.S. military intervention in Bosnia—intervention that (in tandem with a Croat ground assault) eventually forced the Serbs into a peace deal. And in 1999 the Joint Chiefs of Staff leaked to the press their opposition to U.S. war in Kosovo—a war that drove Slobodan Milosevic from Kosovo without a single American combat casualty.

Why were the civilians right? Perhaps because they better understood the political context that shaped the war's outcome. Perhaps because they *hadn't* experienced Vietnam, which led '90s military leaders to repeatedly overestimate the enemy. The point is they had other forms of knowledge at their disposal, knowledge that in these cases turned out to be more salient.

And it is precisely the interaction and competition between those different forms of knowledge that Hagel, Rich, and Pinkerton seek to shut down. If taken seriously, their argument disqualifies anyone who hasn't, won't, or can't see combat from ever advocating American military intervention, including last year against Afghanistan. By that logic, women and the openly gay—both barred from combat—can never be pro-war. (In fact, by that logic, people who haven't served can't even legitimately oppose gay exclusion—since they have no experience of the military morale that the prohibition against open homosexuality seeks to preserve.) And authenticity is an infinitely expandable debaters' trick. For instance, hawks say that keeping Saddam Hussein in power will leave Americans vulnerable to terrorist attack. But people in big cities would be far more vulnerable than those in small towns. Just as with a U.S. invasion, only some Americans would really be in harm's way. Does this mean only those Americans most endangered by Saddam's continued reign can legitimately say we should leave him in power?

At root, the ad hominem anti-war argument denies that thought can transcend experience. And that, in its way, represents a more ambitious effort to foreclose debate than anything dreamed up by Donald Rumsfeld. It certainly doesn't sound like "national dialogue" to me.

PETER BEINART

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Best Case

THE CAPITAL IS choking on conspiracy theories. The liberals believe that the war against Iraq is being constructed clandestinely in the White House and the Pentagon by a bunch of bellicose and doctrinaire conservatives who scorn the American public's right to know the reasons and the methods of such a momentous and dangerous campaign, and who have persuaded President Bush that the war against Saddam Hussein, like the war against Osama bin Laden, is what God expects of him. The conservatives believe that the war against Iraq, and the president's clarity about it, is being obstructed by an assortment of Democratic liberals (this week Howell Raines looms larger in the right-wing demonology than Tom Daschle) and Republican moderates (most notably Chuck Hagel and Brent Scowcroft). The liberals are angry that the administration will not deign to "make the case" for the war, and the conservatives are angry that the case is being challenged.

The case for "regime change" in Iraq is a pretty easy case to make, but the administration seems to be operating in a fantasyland in which everything that seems self-evidently right to it seems self-evidently right to the rest of the country, and all that remains is to work out the precise arrangements of the open society that Iraq will inevitably become on the morning after victory. The sanctimony of the Bushies is interfering with their work. In the manner in which the United States is going about the planning and the justification of this war, it is its own worst enemy—or it would be, if Saddam Hussein were not still in power.

A number of reasons for the war on Saddam Hussein have been given. The most famous reason is that he is evil. And he is evil. But he is not the only evil leader in the world, and we are not proposing to act against other evil leaders, not even against the other leaders in the "axis of evil." The administration has also suggested that its war is justified because it will bring democracy to Iraq. But this, too, cannot explain why the absence of democracy in Iraq is more odious and more threatening than the absence of democracy in many other states. (We did not destroy the Taliban because we were offended by its medieval violations of human rights.) There is also something hypocritical about the belief in democratization when it is propounded by people who also hold the belief in the "clash of civilizations," who were insisting a few months ago that there are regions of the world, particularly the Islamic regions, in which culture makes freedom impossible.

What is it, then, about the villain in Baghdad that should provoke the United States to rid the world of him? One spectacular thing: He is the only leader in the world with weapons of mass destruction who has used them. He used them against Iranian troops and against Kurdish civilians. *This* is what makes Saddam Hussein so distinguished in the field of evil. Morally and strategically, he lives in a post-deterrence world. We do not need to speculate about whether he would do the dirtiest deed. He has already done the dirtiest deed. That is the case, and "the case."

Of course there are some who are not overly impressed by the moral and strategic ramifications of chemical warfare. Writing in *The Washington Post* this week, Zbigniew Brzezinski argued that "the frequently cited but essentially demagogic formula that Hussein used weapons of mass destruction (specifically gas) against his own people ignores the fact that he did not use such weapons in 1991 against either U.S. troops or Israel, both of which had the capacity to retaliate and thus to deter." The implication here is that there is the rational gassing of innocents and the irrational gassing of innocents, and that Saddam Hussein practices only the rational gassing, and so we can deal with him.

Brzezinski sleeps much too well. We would prefer to linger on this side of decency and to insist that the use of weapons of mass destruction denotes a general derangement. A man who actually employs these obscene devices, who regards them not with trepidation but instrumentally, is not a man who can be trusted to behave as the instructions of political science would have him behave. And it should not matter to us that these crimes were not committed against the United States, or that Saddam Hussein's missiles do not have the range to hit American places, because the use of weapons of mass destruction, rather like genocide, represents an international emergency. In international emergencies it is we who must lead. The physical defense of the United States includes also the moral defense of the United States; but the defense of American values sometimes requires action in non-American places. Democracy in the Middle East—in Riyadh, in Cairo, in Baghdad—would be splendid. But biological or chemical or nuclear war would be intolerable. If we do not prevent it, it is not least ourselves that we will have betrayed. ■

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NOTEBOOK

THE CHAMPION: White House Budget Director Mitch Daniels long ago set the standard for fiscal mendacity, but he's not resting on his laurels. Appearing on PBS's "Charlie Rose Show" last week, Daniels asserted, "Please remember that even after this tax cut, Americans are being taxed at the highest peacetime rates in history." Peacetime rates? For nearly a year Daniels has taken every opportunity to wrap George W. Bush's budgetary priorities in the mantle of military emergency. Earlier this year he defended Bush's fiscal blueprint in an op-ed titled "A Wartime Budget." By Daniels's own logic, then, the proper standard of comparison is not peacetime tax rates but wartime tax rates. But Daniels was only warming up. Moments later, when asked how much the tax cut will contribute to the deficit in future years, he replied, "If it contributes to greater economic growth down the road, it'll be a positive factor. Now, I believe it will, and so does the president." So Daniels has embraced the hoary notion—repudiated even by radical supply-siders—that cutting taxes at current rates will increase tax revenues. Meanwhile, the official position of *Daniels's own office* is that the tax cut will contribute 40 percent to the deficit over the next decade. But why should we expect the budget director to read the budget?

RACE TO THE BOTTOM: It wasn't long ago that conservatives were fretting that Elizabeth Dole was too moderate to fill the shoes of their hero, retiring North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms. "Conservatives here distrust Dole, despite a full endorsement by Helms and a more conservative position on guns and abortion than she displayed in her failed 2000 presidential run," Robert Novak reported from North Carolina last February. But having already shifted from moderate to conservative Republicanism, Dole seems willing to let her supporters carry her farther still along the political spectrum, toward the kind of coded racial appeals of Helms's 30-year tenure. How else to interpret the letter sent out by Sim DeLapp, former head of the North Carolina Christian Coalition, to about 3,500 of his fellow Christian conservatives? Endorsing Dole and attacking one of her no-name GOP primary opponents, Jim Snyder, DeLapp reported that Snyder "caused great controversy here in Davidson County last year when he gave an impromptu speech to County Commissioners in favor of a local Martin Luther King, Jr., holiday. We all favor civil rights, but again—we wonder why Jim Snyder takes such a controversial position contrary to Senator Helms." So tell us Liddy, where do you stand on this "controversial" issue?

CREDIBILITY GAP: At the recent convention of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), Representative Ellen Tauscher, the DLC's vice-chair, joined the chorus attacking the populist rhetoric of Al Gore's presidential campaign. "I shuddered all through 2000," she said. "I was constantly talking to Democrats and Independents who were voting for me but were turned off by that rhetoric." Or maybe they were just telling her what she wanted to hear. Tauscher won her Bay-area district with 160,429 votes; Gore carried it with 161,773.

JUDGE WHAT I SAY, NOT WHAT I DO: "Am I trying to usurp power, or am I trying to bring democracy to Pakistan, that is the question. You have to believe me, and take me on my word, I want to bring democracy."—Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, *The New York Times*, May 5

"President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan single-handedly enacted 29 amendments to his country's Constitution today, granting himself near-dictatorial powers.... [T]he new measures will allow him to change the Constitution at will, dissolve the country's elected Parliament, and appoint its military chiefs and supreme court justices."—*The New York Times*, August 21

GREAT MOMENTS IN MIDDLE EASTERN DIPLOMACY: "'This fatso [Ariel] Sharon,' Mr. Mubarak is reported to have [recently told Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres], referring to the bulky Israeli leader. 'I hear he eats an entire lamb for dinner. How can anyone fall asleep after that?' Mr. Mubarak reportedly went on to say that he had sent a senior general to meet with Mr. Sharon at the latter's farm. While the general had expected a huge meal, he was served only two sausages and a tomato. 'We were so hurt that I could not just overlook the incident,' Mr. Mubarak was reported to have told Mr. Peres. 'I complained to Sharon, and he said next time the general would get three sausages.'"—*The New York Times*, August 12 (Thanks to Warren Bass.)

OPEN TO INTERPRETATION: "MEDICAL PRIVACY RULES GET TIGHTENED"—lead story, *The Seattle Times*, August 10

"BUSH WEAKENS MEDICAL PRIVACY"—lead story, *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, same day (Thanks to several readers.)

NEVER MIND THE VOTERS: "Though cautioning that it is Bush's decision to make, Cheney added: 'If the president's willing and if my wife approves and if the doctors say it's okay, then I'd be happy to serve a second term.'"—*The Washington Post*, August 8 (Thanks to Evan Schultz.)

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS: Last issue's cover story ("Rogue State," by Jonathan Chait) mistakenly asserted that Delaware does not have a state gas tax. It does. The *Yale Law Journal* was mis-cited as the *Yale Law Review*. The state of Maryland charges tolls in its northbound lanes but not its southbound ones, rather than the reverse. And Justice Louis Brandeis apparently did not coin the phrase "race to the bottom," though he is often described as having done so. He was, however, the first to describe the phenomenon, which he referred to as the "race ... of laxity." We regret the errors. ■

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Why Saddam doesn't need missiles.

Stealth Bomber

By JANINE ZACHARIA

JERUSALEM, ISRAEL

THE SCENES ARE grimly familiar. In the Gaza Strip, Palestinian children carrying rifles chant, "Ya Saddam! Ya Saddam!" and goad the Iraqi leader to lob Scud missiles at Israel. Up the Mediterranean coast, in the basement of a Tel Aviv kindergarten, 20 teachers watch a female soldier demonstrate how to administer atropine, an anti-nerve-gas agent, to students. The Israeli army's home-front command is urging citizens to upgrade old gas masks and take home iodine pills in case Saddam Hussein sends a missile into Israel's nuclear reactor and radiation leaks out. On August 21 Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his top security advisers ordered the immunization of emergency "first-response teams" against smallpox, a virus Saddam is believed to be able to mount on his Scuds, and they continue to discuss a population-wide inoculation. And Israel has scattered Arrow anti-missile batteries across the country to defend against an Iraqi attack.

It's not hard to understand why Israelis worry about missiles. In 1991 Saddam fired 39 Scuds at the Jewish state. Back then Israelis got lucky: No one was killed by the conventional missiles, and Iraq fitted 25 Scuds with germ warheads only to abandon them—in part out of fear of a potential Israeli nuclear response and in part because Saddam recognized that his rule was not necessarily threatened. This time, with regime change the American goal, that logic might not contain him. "If the administration goes ahead with a plan to remove Saddam ... he will have every incentive to attack Israel with the goal of killing as many as possible," says one U.S. intelligence source. "The countermeasures available may be similar, but the Iraqi calculation on the risks of hitting Israel will be different."

Still, while the Israeli public focuses on a missile attack, Israeli security and terrorism experts quietly worry about a more sinister prospect: that Saddam could equip Palestinian militants with deadly biological pathogens that, if disbursed clandestinely, could go undetected until scores of people fall ill. The missile threat certainly exists. Even one Scud topped with a nonconventional warhead could cause considerable damage and even more chaos. But Israel has spent the last eleven years bolstering what military analysts call "active" and "passive" defense measures; and over the same period Iraq's missile capability has withered under years of U.N. sanctions. A veteran Israeli military planner estimates that Saddam has just 15 Scuds left and is confident that Israel could knock them out of the sky with its Arrows. And if one missile does penetrate, Israel has one of the best response programs in the world for isolating the area and treating the victims. "Israel has the best regimented system of civil defense," says former Mossad deputy head Uzi Arad, now director of the Institute of Policy and Strategy at Herzliya's Interdisciplinary Center (IDC). "The level of damage [Saddam] can cause Israel has been reduced to very little." None of this, sadly, can be said about a nonconventional terrorist attack, one that would combine Iraqi weapons with Palestinian guerrilla skills.

THERE ARE PLENTY of signs that Saddam is trying to ally himself with Palestinian militants. On August 12 the Palestine Liberation Organization's (PLO) hard-line foreign minister, Farouq Qaddoumi, visited Baghdad to confer with his Iraqi counterpart, Naji Sabri. Last year Fuad Shubaki, a senior financial adviser to Yasir Arafat, secretly visited Baghdad. Saddam shelters several prominent Palestinian terrorist organizations in Baghdad, some of which are active in the Gaza Strip and West Bank—including the Arab Liberation Front, a terrorist faction of the PLO that rejects the peace process and coordinates payments to families of suicide bombers. For years Saddam backed the Palestine Liberation Front, headed by Abu Abbas, who carried out the 1985 *Achille Lauro* cruise ship hijacking; and Saddam has sheltered the infamous Abu Nidal Organization, the namesake of which was reported on August 19 to be dead in Iraq. All these groups have offices in Baghdad and receive training, logistical assistance, and financial aid from the Iraqi leadership. "With the PLO structure historically, and until now, there are factions—two to three—that are well-known to be pro-Saddam Hussein, and they are still on the payroll of the Iraqi government, and they are widely viewed as an Iraqi intelligence tool," one U.S. government expert on Iraq says. "Those factions have constituencies and active cells within the [Palestinian Authority] areas." With his handsome payments of $25,000 for each suicide bomber's family, Saddam is arguably the most popular figure in Palestine today.

Now Saddam's weapons and the P.A.'s goals may be converging. Israeli intelligence repeatedly warns of the "mega-terror" bomb the Palestinians hope to devise, one that will boost their killing potential. To that end, Palestinian bombers have already tried several times to go nonconventional, albeit in rudimentary ways. Last December a suicide bomber soaked the nails placed in the explosive in rat poison. The body of one June 2001 suicide bomber was discovered to be infected with hepatitis; Israeli intelligence claimed the Palestinians deliberately chose someone with the disease to see if it would infect victims. The bombing of an Israeli hotel that killed 29 at a Passover seder in March, according to the IDF, was originally planned as a cyanide gas attack that might have killed many more. The head of Israeli military intelligence later said the plot was scrapped

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at the last minute because of technical difficulties.

That's where Saddam comes in. He still has chemical capabilities, experts say, including nerve gas, which can—among other evils—effectively contaminate a water system. But by most accounts, his easy-to-disguise biological warfare program is believed to have made the most progress since U.N. inspectors left Iraq with their mission unfulfilled in December 1998. And Saddam, says Dany Shoham, a veteran Israeli military intelligence analyst and a nonconventional-weapons expert, "has a special affinity for biological weapons ... which are much more dreadful." Earlier this month an American spy satellite photographed a convoy of 60 trucks at a known biological weapons factory near Taji—which after the Gulf war was found to have produced hundreds of liters of botulinum toxin. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld spoke openly recently about Saddam's mobile biological warfare laboratories. Biological weaponry "is the thing that worries me more than anything else, because [Saddam] was very successful at hiding a lot of the biological stuff from UNSCOM even before he threw the inspectors out," says one senior U.S. administration official. In 1998, before the launch of Desert Fox—a limited U.S. strike on Iraq designed to punish Saddam's intransigence over U.N. weapons inspections—the United States shipped sophisticated biological-weaponry-detection equipment to Israel under the rubric of an exercise with European forces, one former official involved in the planning explains. And according to an intelligence report submitted to Prime Minister Tony Blair and first reported by *The Times* of London on August 3, Saddam is suspected of planning to arm a Palestinian terrorist group with biological weapons to attack either American or Israeli targets. "The Palestinian connection is now at the heart of intelligence thinking," the newspaper said.

WHY WOULD SADDAM arm the Palestinians rather than just use these weapons against Israel himself? For one thing, it's hard to predict how such biological agents could be effectively dispersed. The agents at Saddam's disposal, according to varying reports, include botulinum toxin, anthrax, ricin, smallpox, and maybe the Ebola virus—the hardest of all to distribute. No one knows how these would behave on top of a missile in sweltering heat. They could burn up in flight or land among Arabs in the West Bank or even in Jordan. Israeli officials worry that to get around this problem, Saddam might slam a kamikaze plane into an Israeli city or send a drone to crop-dust an area with his nonconventional arsenal. A CIA report earlier this year said Iraq has been converting L-29 trainer aircraft into pilotless vehicles "for delivery of chemical, or more likely, biological warfare agents." But a drone, like a missile, can be shot down.

Which is why the easiest way for Saddam to circumvent these difficulties may be simply to equip a Palestinian terrorist with a slightly modified aerosol can, replace the deodorant with a test-tube-sized amount of smallpox (which is highly contagious and easily transmittable by air), and have the terrorist spray the virus in a shopping mall, movie theater, or school. If the terrorist wants to avoid the risk that the illness will spread to the Palestinian territories via contagious viruses like smallpox, he could always use other agents—for instance, botulinum and ricin—to sabotage Israel's water system. Or he could use high-grade powdered anthrax, like that sent by U.S. mail. It would be enough, says Shoham "to open a test tube and shake it. ... If he is more sophisticated he could put it in the ventilation of the Azrieli building," a Tel Aviv skyscraper. Experts say it could take a few days before people began detecting symptoms of illness, which would make the perpetrator harder to detect and would give Saddam—the once-removed source of the attack—even more cover.

Of course, Saddam may not desire cover: He might want Israel—and more importantly the Arab world—to know the destruction was his. But if his goal is simply to kill as many Israelis as possible as easily as possible, smuggling a syringe into the Palestinian territories may be more effective than a missile. After all, today Saddam has a strategic asset that wasn't available during the Gulf war: a militant Palestinian population willing, even eager, to die in the fight against the Jewish state. ■

White House Watch

Future Tense

By RYAN LIZZA

IF THERE IS one lesson President George W. Bush is supposed to have learned from his father's presidency, it is that political capital disappears if it is not spent. George H. W. Bush's great mistake, the thinking goes, was that he failed to use his post-Gulf-war popularity to attack the domestic problems that concerned voters in 1992. So when Bush's approval ratings soared after September 11, White House aides promised that 43 would not repeat the mistakes of 41. Speaking to reporters last December, Bush Senior Adviser Karl Rove explained, "This president understands the perishability of [political] capital. You build up capital through right action, and you spend it. If you don't spend it, it's not like treasure stuck away at a storehouse someplace. It is perishable. It dwindles away."

Conservatives had hoped that Bush would spend his capital pushing the right's agenda through Congress. But there is scant evidence Bush ever intended to do so. Long before Enron, the White House decided against promoting Bush's Social Security plan in 2002. Bush hasn't wasted much energy fighting for his judicial nominees—51 are still pending before the Senate. And though the president opposed much of the important legislation passed by Congress this year—the farm bill, campaign finance reform, corporate accountability—he signed all of it into law. He hasn't issued a single veto.

What Bush *has* spent his political capital on is the 2002

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midterm elections. Through August he will have visited 35 states, attended almost 50 fund-raisers, and raised about $110 million this year in support of dozens of Republican House, Senate, and gubernatorial candidates—a record that dwarfs Bill Clinton's 1994 politicking. And it's not just Bush. Vice President Dick Cheney has headlined some 50 separate Republican fund-raisers. The administration has tinkered with national policies and redirected federal resources to assist politically important areas of the country. Cabinet secretaries have fanned out to campaign in states and districts with competitive races. And long before the election season began, Bush and his aides personally recruited the strongest Republican candidates (like John Thune in the South Dakota Senate race) and stopped the weaker ones from running (like Tim Pawlenty in the Minnesota Senate race). In other words, Bush has spent a lot more time, energy, and political capital trying to elect a new Congress than he has spent working with the current one.

By injecting himself into almost every key race in the United States, Bush is—White House denials notwithstanding—turning himself into this election's major issue. Which has its dangers. For example, in South Dakota last week, Bush's failure to provide new drought relief for the state dominated coverage of his trip and hurt Thune, who had hoped having Bush at his side would gain him points with voters. And in California this week Bush's support for the doomed gubernatorial campaign of Bill Simon will become a widely covered liability for the president. It's true that midterms are always interpreted as a barometer of the country's happiness with the commander in chief; but by making the elections its top domestic priority, and by lending the president's credibility to so many candidates, the White House risks turning the election into a referendum on Bush.

A FEW MONTHS ago tying Bush to Republican success seemed like a good bet. In a June 4 presentation, Rove cited several factors making the "midterm political landscape more favorable to Republicans": a "recovering economy," "increased importance of national security issues," and, most of all, an "extremely popular president." Today the first two are no longer operative: The economy is stagnant, consumer confidence is shaky, and a majority of voters are pessimistic about the economy's near-term prospects. On national security, polls show that voters are not inclined to cast their ballots based on the issue; worse, according to *National Journal*'s Charlie Cook, the recent debate over attacking Iraq may have *hurt* Bush's approval rating. Which leads to Rove's third factor: "extremely popular president." At its current rate of decline, Bush's job approval on Election Day will be around 55 percent (it is currently in the mid-60s). As Rove himself noted in a slide titled "PRESIDENTS' STANDING MATTERS," historically in midterm elections when a president's approval rating is 50 percent to 59 percent, his party loses an average of 20 House seats.

The other fact that places Bush at the uncomfortable center of this fall's campaign is that it is taking place in red America. Most of the races that matter are being contested in states and districts Bush won in 2000. In the fight for control of the House, for example, Cook lists 39 races as truly competitive. Bush carried 23 of these in 2000. Of the twelve open seats (i.e., where there is no incumbent) that congressional handicapper Stuart Rothenberg identifies as the best opportunities for Democrats, Bush won nine. The battle for the Senate is also being waged in Bush territory. He won 13 of the 18 states with competitive Senate races. This raises expectations for Bush and his party. The better Democrats do in these red areas, the more the midterms will be seen as a personal defeat for Bush.

WHICH IS WHY Bush is so closely linking his 2002 activity with his 2004 reelection strategy. There are 16 states where the margin of victory for Al Gore or Bush was five points or fewer. If you consider the combined votes of Gore and Ralph Nader, this list of close states expands to 20. Bush and Gore split these states eleven to nine in 2000, while Bill Clinton won every one at least once and 17 of them twice. This is where the 2004 election will be fought, and it is where Bush has concentrated the majority of his efforts this year. By THE NEW REPUBLIC's count, 46 of his 75 political trips this year have been to these states, and almost half of his fund-raisers have been for candidates in them—even when there's little at stake in 2002. For example, Bush has traveled four times to Ohio this year and held one fund-raiser for incumbent Governor Bob Taft—even though there is no Senate race in Ohio this year and just one competitive House race, and Taft is one of the safest Republican gubernatorial candidates in the country. But Bush won Ohio by just 3.5 points, and the state is essential to his reelection.

The danger for Bush is that the more time he spends politicking out in the country, the more the 2002 election results will be interpreted as about him. This has already happened in the gubernatorial race in Florida, where Bush's brother is running for reelection; in the Senate race in South Dakota, considered a proxy battle between Bush and his Senate tormentor Tom Daschle; and in the gubernatorial and Senate races in Texas. Since these are all states Bush carried or where his candidates enjoy incumbency, he has already lost the expectations game in these races. If Republicans win all of them it will be a significant victory for him, but losing any one will be considered a giant defeat. And the number of races where Bush himself is the key issue is increasing. In Mississippi, Representative Charles Pickering, son of the Bush judicial nominee rejected by Senate Democrats, is in danger of losing. Hoping to avenge this defeat, Bush and Cheney have made the race a White House priority.

What's more, Bush has spent a great deal of energy wooing a set of special interests and religious and ethnic groups. He proposed a pro-coal energy plan, slapped tariffs on steel imports, signed an expensive farm bill, and tried to court Catholics and Hispanics with his faith-based initiative and immigration proposals. How these targeted groups treat Bush's favored candidates this year will give us the first indi-

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cations of Bush's own prospects for 2004. The West Virginia race of Republican incumbent Shelley Moore Capito will be a referendum on Bush's coal policy. In Pennsylvania's fifteenth district, vulnerable Republican Patrick Toomey will find out how effective steel tariffs have been for the GOP. The competitive Senate races of Iowa, South Dakota, Missouri, and Minnesota will test his farm policy, while the two competitive House races in New Mexico that the White House has targeted will test Bush's wooing of Hispanics. Bush is spending his political capital alright, but if the GOP loses at the polls this fall he may find it has bought him nothing but trouble. ■

Michael Powell v. economic recovery.

Cable Access

By JOHN B. JUDIS

TELECOMMUNICATIONS WAS THE driving force behind the great economic boom of the late '90s. Between 1996 and 2000 the telecom industry grew at twice the rate of the national economy. By March of last year telecom companies had reached a market value of $3 trillion, and their share of the national GDP had risen to almost 6 percent. The Internet, and wireless and other telecom services, spurred investment in information technology, which by 1999 accounted for 43 percent of private, nonresidential investment. To a great extent, the boom of the late '90s was a telecommunications boom.

By the same token, the bust of the early 2000s is being driven largely by a collapse in telecom. The industry has lost an estimated $2 trillion in paper value on the stock market—more than eight times what it cost to bail out the savings and loan industry a decade ago. New investment capital, vital for innovation, has dried up. In the first six months of this year (i.e., *before* WorldCom's bankruptcy) telecom lost 225,000 jobs, one-fifth of the total jobs lost in the country. And with thousands of miles of excess capacity in fiber-optic cable, and as much as $500 billion in questionable debt, the industry may continue to hemorrhage value and jobs for the foreseeable future—potentially imperiling the country's overall recovery. Says former Federal Communications Commission (FCC) chairman Reed Hundt, "If the communications sector doesn't start attracting investment again, it's going to be hard for business investment in general to increase. And if that doesn't happen soon, the whole economy will begin to shrink again."

The government official most responsible for turning telecom around is the current FCC chair, Michael Powell, son of Colin. Articulate and well-liked on Capitol Hill, Powell was the first choice for the FCC job of former Senator Commerce Committee chair John McCain and House Commerce Committee chair Billy Tauzin. But Powell has proven a disaster. He has equivocated, frustrating even ardent supporters like Tauzin; and when he has finally acted, it has been to prolong rather than shorten the telecom slump. Like Harvey Pitt, the chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), Powell would be ripe for replacement—if his feckless, ideological approach didn't so perfectly reflect the president he serves.

BY POWELL'S OWN admission, the key to reviving the telecom industry is stimulating the growth and improvement of broadband—the high-speed Internet connections that are widespread in business but have only incrementally made their way into consumers' homes. High-speed Internet connections—carried either over cable TV lines or phone lines (called DSL, for "digital subscriber line")—could speed the technological convergence between the phone, the computer, and the television and spark new investment in hardware, software, and infrastructure. As Powell himself stated in testimony last month before the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee, "Broadband very likely holds the key for the long-term recovery of the telecommunication industry, and indeed our nation's long-term economic growth and its ability to compete on the global stage."

But the growth of broadband is lagging. Eighty percent of businesses connected to the Internet use broadband, but only 12 percent of homes with Internet service do—not nearly enough to spark widespread new investment. The reason is largely that prices for residential broadband remain high. While other kinds of telecom prices—from long-distance and wireless-phone rates to super-high-speed oc-3 lines—have fallen, prices for high-speed cable and DSL connections have actually *risen*. It costs between $40 and $50 per month for residential broadband, compared with just $10 or $20 for slower, dial-up modem connections.

Why have broadband prices risen while other telecom services are getting cheaper? The answer can be found in the first chapter of most economic textbooks: There is little or no competition among broadband providers. In most areas, the cable company connects residences to the Internet through the TV cable, and the regional Bell company connects businesses through DSL lines. Cable and phone companies rarely compete with one another, and both have effectively discouraged independent service providers (ISPs) like MindSpring or EarthLink from using their connections. Cable companies have often blocked other providers outright, while phone companies have used a variety of tactics—from getting local or state commissions to set prohibitively high rental prices for their lines to sabotaging rival systems by deceiving them about whether Internet addresses were available. In Virginia, when one small town, Bristol, wanted to set up its own broadband system, Verizon lobbyists persuaded the pliant, Republican-controlled state legislature to pass a law prohibiting any town from doing so.

In the older dial-up market, where prices have fallen, there

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are 15 ISPs for every 100,000 subscribers—everything from AOL to MSN to the small start-up. These ISPs have been the source of innovations like instant messaging. In the high-speed market, by contrast, there are fewer than two ISPs for every 100,000 subscribers. Affiliates of cable and phone companies have a 95 percent share of the broadband market. That lack of competition keeps prices up, demand down, and innovation at bay.

That's the short-run problem limiting broadband's expansion. The long-run problem is that the high-speed services offered by the cable and phone companies are still fairly primitive. During the late '90s fledgling companies laid down high-capacity fiber-optic lines between large cities and even across oceans, but phone companies continued transmitting the "last mile" of connections—i.e., from local hubs to individual residences or businesses—through slower, lower-capacity copper wires. This isn't a problem for telephone conversations, which transmit a relatively small amount of information at a slow speed. But it's a major problem for broadband, which transmits huge bundles of information and can be greatly slowed down by copper wires. Nor is widespread broadband access over cable lines a solution: Like copper phone lines, cable is a relatively low-capacity conductor, and the speed of delivery slows dramatically as the number of users grows. (If you subscribe to broadband through your local cable system, cross your fingers that your neighbors don't follow suit.) To achieve its potential, broadband providers need to "uncork the last mile," extending fiber-optic connections to office buildings and residences. But so far, the Baby Bells, which own the wires, have proved reluctant to replace them. And why should they? Lacking competition, they have little incentive to improve or innovate.

THERE ARE SOLUTIONS to these problems, some fairly obvious. As Americans first learned a century ago, the way to encourage competition in an industry that tends toward natural monopoly is through strong government regulation. That is the long-standing purpose of antitrust laws. In this case, the FCC has the power to force the cable and phone companies to open their lines—for a reasonable price, of course—to the competing Internet providers trying to enter the high-speed market. The problem of wiring the last mile is a trickier one; but here, too, the government could adopt measures like those it has traditionally used to encourage new industries. Just as it helped develop the railroad, automobile, and airline industries by subsidizing the construction of rail, roads, and airports, the government could subsidize the last mile of the information highway, either through tax breaks or outright grants. (Former FCC chair Hundt and others have urged exactly this.) By so doing, the government would also preserve its right to demand open access to the broadband infrastructure it had helped create.

But Powell, backed by the Baby Bells and the cable companies, has rejected these forward-looking solutions in favor of a simplistic mantra of "deregulation." "Deregulation is a critical ingredient to facilitate competition," Powell announced when he was nominated last year. But Powell's brand of deregulation protects the Baby Bells and cable companies from competition in the illogical hope that they will invest in new technology to improve transmission. Far from increasing competition, it will reinforce the trend toward monopoly.

AT FIRST, POWELL'S deregulatory crusade was largely rhetorical, but this year he began to take action. In February, Powell, who enjoys a three-to-one majority on the FCC, announced a "proposed rulemaking" on "telephone-based broadband." According to the FCC's decision, telephone-based broadband services are "information services, with a telecommunications component, rather than telecommunications services." The distinction sounds semantic, but it has profound legal implications. According to the Telecommunications Act of 1996, telecommunications services have to grant open access to their facilities, but information services do not. By defining telephone broadband as an information service—a designation originally intended for content providers like LexisNexis—the FCC removed it from regulation, allowing the Baby Bells to ban other ISPs from transmitting over their lines.

The next month Powell struck again—getting his majority to declare that cable-based broadband was "an interstate information service" and not either a "telecommunication service" or a "cable service." Here again, by defining cable broadband as an information rather than a telecommunication service, Powell permitted cable to ban other providers from using their lines. Moreover, by defining cable as an "interstate" information service rather than a "cable service," he removed it from any local regulation over prices and service. Michael J. Copps, the sole dissenter on Powell's FCC, said of the March decision, "Make no mistake—today's decision places these services outside any viable and predictable regulatory framework." Or as *Governing* magazine put it, the decision means "local governments won't be able to enforce customer service standards."

Lately, as deregulation has been discredited by scandal, Powell has openly espoused the end to which deregulation was the means. In an interview last month with *The Wall Street Journal*, Powell admitted that he favored major (supposedly innovation-spurring) consolidations in the telecommunications industry along the same lines of those the defense industry underwent in the '90s. During the '90s the defense industry was reduced from about a dozen to three giant firms: Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, and Boeing. By that logic, the telecommunications industry would consolidate into a handful of firms based on the Baby Bells. But as Mark Cooper of the Consumer Federation of America has noted, the two industries are hardly analogous. Defense firms contract primarily with a single buyer, the U.S. government, which enjoys substantial leverage over them. They are thus intrinsically subject to government oversight. Phone and cable monopolies, by contrast, contract with millions of unorganized consumers who, in the absence of a vigilant FCC, can't exert much influence over them.

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If you want an analogy for what Powell is trying to do, you have to look at the Bell system before the breakup of AT&T in 1982 or to the French telecommunication monopoly in the '90s. AT&T was broken up partly because its monopoly was stunting innovation and removing competition. Long-distance prices fell *40 percent* in the decade after AT&T's breakup. Similarly, French Telecom once boasted about its Minitel network, which since 1981 provided text-based, monochrome information services. But by the mid-'90s its monopoly held back the introduction of the Internet, a far better medium for conveying information. The U.S. telecom industry could eventually suffer similar obsolescence under Powell's plans for new consolidated regional monopolies.

Indeed, U.S. failure to wire the last mile is already undermining its telecom industry in relation to competitors in South Korea and Canada. South Koreans, for instance, are currently four times more likely to have broadband than are Americans; and South Korean telecom companies are now in a position to leapfrog their American competitors in Internet technology in much the same way American telecom firms leapfrogged the once-formidable Japanese during the '90s. (This, too, was largely because the Japanese were held back by a national monopoly, NTT.) Falling behind in telecom technology won't just mean American consumers have to wait for affordable broadband service. It will mean, as Powell himself argues, that the telecom industry will likely remain in the doldrums—and perhaps keep the overall economy there with it.

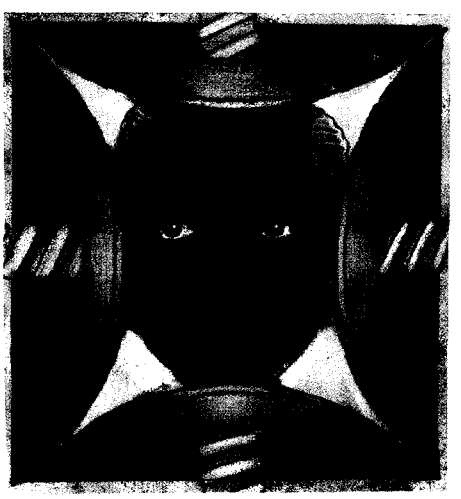
In June, when the *Los Angeles Times* asked Powell what he considered his greatest accomplishment at the FCC, he responded, "I'm still here." It was a joke that could just as easily have been made by Paul O'Neill at Treasury, Harvey Pitt at the SEC, or Lawrence Lindsey in the White House. Powell is yet another Bush administration appointee who has not measured up to the daunting challenge of a downturn that has swept away many of the gains American industry made in the late '90s. Powell may indeed survive. Sadly, the American telecom industry—and with it, hopes for a near-term economic recovery—may not. ■

Does Washington deserve its mayor?

Trial Run

By JASON ZENGERLE

ON A RECENT Friday afternoon in Washington, D.C., Mayor Anthony Williams was standing on the corner of Seventh Street and New York Avenue shaking hands with attendees at a labor rally. The mayor was there—in a bright-yellow hard hat, no less—for an announcement by the local chapter of the AFL-CIO that it was endorsing his bid for a second term. And as Williams stood a little bit stiffly on a makeshift dais awaiting his turn to speak, the local AFL-CIO chief ticked off everything labor planned to do for the mayor's reelection campaign. The building and trades union, the labor leader declared, would plaster the city with campaign posters; the communications workers' union would set up phone banks; the civil service union would staff the polling places on Election Day; the firefighters' union would make sure the poll workers were fed. And then the AFL-CIO chief came to the teachers' union, which had the most important job of all: Its members would instruct voters on how to write the mayor's name on their ballots.



EDEL RODRIGUEZ

This is what Williams's once-promising mayoralty has been reduced to: Though he is the incumbent, and until recently was running essentially unopposed, his reelection now depends on a write-in campaign for the September 10 Democratic primary (which in Washington is, for all intents and purposes, the general election). Williams headed into the campaign with a 70 percent approval rating, $1.4 million in contributions, and no credible challenger. But he failed at the most elemental task of politics: gathering the requisite 2,000 nominating signatures to secure a place on the ballot. The Williams campaign actually submitted more than 10,000 signatures to the city's elections board in early July; but on closer inspection, thousands of those signatures turned out to be either fraudulent or forged. And the elections board—all three of whose members had been either appointed or reappointed by Williams—unanimously voted to bump the mayor from the ballot.

Even in a city accustomed to political soap operas, Williams's current predicament is shocking. For one

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thing, the 51-year-old Williams—a cerebral technocrat with degrees from Yale and Harvard who made his reputation as Washington's chief financial officer—was elected four years ago on the promise that he would bring competence to a long-dysfunctional city government. And, for the most part, he has delivered. Basic city services like garbage collection, snow removal, and rat eradication—services that often went unperformed under Williams's predecessors—are now performed with enough regularity that they are once again considered basic. More impressively, Washington's murder rate has declined by more than one-third on Williams's watch; the infant mortality rate has been halved; and the city has balanced its budget five years in a row (which last fall allowed for the dissolution of the congressionally mandated financial control board that had overseen the District's government since 1995). This, in turn, has lured new people and businesses to the city: Census figures show that, after losing thousands of residents each year for much of the 1990s, Washington's population has leveled off at about 570,000 in recent years (nearby Baltimore, by contrast, lost nearly 16,000 people in the 15 months following the 2000 census); and between 2001 and 2002 the District, for the first time in years, outpaced the traditionally booming Maryland and Virginia suburbs in job creation. While Washington still has its problems, the city, in a relatively short period of time, has been transformed. "If any one person deserves credit for [Washington's] turnaround," a recent article in *Governing* magazine declared, "it is Mayor Anthony A. Williams."

BUT PERHAPS EVEN more shocking than Williams's petition debacle have been Washingtonians' reactions to it. Although Williams is, arguably, the best mayor the city has had in its 28 years of home rule; although his predecessors committed far worse transgressions, whether it was Marion Barry smoking crack or Sharon Pratt Kelly taking a political contribution from a foreign government; although his sin was ultimately against himself, since he had no real competition in the mayor's race, the petition scandal has revealed Williams's support to be remarkably thin. Indeed, far from cutting Williams any slack for his recent troubles, a large cross-section of Washingtonians—black and white, rich and poor—have eagerly piled on. Some have declared Williams's petition slipup to be worse than Barry's drug conviction. Others have cackled that Williams's removal from the ballot is a well-deserved form of comeuppance. Despite the improvements Williams has brought to Washington, one thing he has clearly not been able to create is a stable constituency for good government.

Which is why, in his bid for a second term, Williams is now campaigning less as a reformer and more as a penitent. Williams has a big head with large ears, and his customary attire—a dark suit and a bow tie—only accentuates his nerdiness. But at the labor rally, Williams wore a white cotton shirt and khakis, as if trying to soften his image. When it was his turn to speak, he didn't dwell much on his accomplishments; instead, he apologized. "All of you know that right now we have been set back," Williams said. He talked of how the setback had "humbled" him, and he said he took full responsibility for what had occurred. The mayor then declared that, in spite of his difficulties, he was determined to go forward with his "journey"—and he asked those assembled for their support. "I throw myself on the mercy of the people," he declared, before leading the crowd in a brief cheer of "Write In!" Throughout the rally passing motorists yelled out their windows and jeered.

WILLIAMS PROBABLY WOULD have gotten away with his petition signature shenanigans had it not been for a civic activist named Dorothy Brizill, who has been a thorn in the side of Washington mayors for the past 20 years. In the mid-'80s Brizill called attention to Barry's practice of awarding city land—at little or no cost—to a favored group of developers. In the early '90s she discovered that one of Kelly's top aides had ordered several heads of government departments to solicit political donations from city contractors. As *The Washington Post* recently headlined a story about Brizill: "MAYORS COME AND GO, BUT 1 ACTIVIST REMAINS."

Together with her husband, Brizill now runs a good-government group called D.C. Watch. And it was D.C. Watch, along with two local Republican Party activists, that challenged Williams's nominating petitions before the District's elections board. Challenging a nominating petition is not an easy thing to do in the District of Columbia: Each and every questionable signature must be challenged separately, with a separate explanation—and relevant citation from the D.C. code—required for each challenge. Indeed, it took Brizill and her husband six full days to review Williams's 10,000 nominating signatures—writing up challenges for signature after signature—until they concluded that only 884 of them were legitimate. When the D.C. elections board, after three days of hearings in late July, finally ruled in favor of the challenge and knocked Williams from the ballot, Brizill put her head down and began to cry—as much out of exhaustion as elation.

An attractive woman in her mid-fifties with coffee-colored skin and hair pulled back in a bun, Brizill has a no-nonsense bearing reminiscent of a good middle-school teacher. During a recent visit to THE NEW REPUBLIC's offices, she pulled out a file holding copies of some of Williams's nominating petitions and showed me page after page of signatures written in an identical hand. "See what I mean in terms of the handwriting?" Brizill asked, peering at me over small reading glasses. She added with a little bit of a laugh, "They weren't very smart about the whole thing."

I asked Brizill how she thought this mayoral transgression stacks up against all the others she has witnessed during her tenure as the city's unofficial ethics ombudsman. "It's up there at the top; it's up there at the top," she replied. "I have never seen such a frontal assault on D.C.'s election laws and election process." And then, as all conversations about D.C. politics eventually do, the talk came around to Barry. "If I was to

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compare this incident to Barry being caught at the hotel smoking crack," Brizill said, "personally I would rate this more substantial than Barry. Because what Barry did at the hotel and Barry's drug addiction were crimes against himself."

Brizill explained that she voted for Williams four years earlier in the belief that the two of them shared the same vision for fixing D.C.'s incompetent government. Indeed, Washington's years of governmental incompetence and corruption had given rise to an entire class of civic activists like Brizill, and that group had formed one of Williams's most important bases of support. But Brizill and many of her ilk quickly grew disillusioned with Williams. Today Brizill lumps him in with his failed predecessors. "I think I'd give them all a D," she told me. "I would give Tony Williams perhaps a D minus." Philip Pannell, another civic activist who supported Williams in 1998, recently complained to the *Washington City Paper* that the mayor is "complacent, detached." As Brizill sees it, Williams's various accomplishments—such as consistent garbage removal and fixing potholes—are things any mayor should do, even if the mayors before Williams often did not. What's more, despite the clear lesson of Barry's reign—that a charismatic mayor is not necessarily a good mayor—Brizill faults Williams for not connecting with many Washingtonians. "The fundamental flaw in Mayor Williams," she said, "is that if you're mayor, you're not just a technocrat, you don't just make the trains run on time."

Brizill's—and other civic activists'—vision for the District's government is utopian; and back when the District government was a virtual dystopia, that utopianism wasn't a bad thing. But now that the city has a mayor who is actually trying to improve things, the perfect has become the enemy of the good. I asked Brizill if, having now placed Williams's political future in jeopardy, she saw anyone on the District's horizon who would do a better job. There was a long pause. "What frustrates me and what angers me," she said, "is the fact that we get to this point in time, where there are all these problems with Tony Williams, and we look around and we don't have any developing political leaders. ... And that scares me. Because then what are you left with?"

THE REVEREND Willie Wilson offered one answer to Brizill's question earlier this month when he became the first—and, so far, only—Washington political figure to capitalize on Williams's predicament by declaring his own write-in candidacy for mayor. Wilson is pastor of the Union Temple Baptist Church, a 7,000-member congregation that lays east of the Anacostia River—the poor, black side of one of the city's starkest and most durable socioeconomic dividing lines. Union Temple is known for blending a Baptist liturgy with black nationalist politics: Its sanctuary features a 60-foot mural of a black Jesus surrounded by twelve black apostles, among them Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Marcus Garvey. Louis Farrakhan has frequently spoken from Union Temple's pulpit.

The 58-year-old Wilson began pastoring at Union Temple in the early '70s, but he didn't become widely known in Washington until the fall of 1986. That's when Wilson led a boycott against the Asian American owner of a carryout restaurant who had allegedly threatened a black customer with a gun. At one boycott rally Wilson famously declared, "They say, 'Reverend Wilson, you are not forgiving.' But we did forgive him. If we didn't forgive him we would have cut his head off and rolled it down the street."

Wilson emerged as a major player in Washington politics several years later in 1990, when, after Barry was caught smoking crack in an FBI sting, the reverend became the disgraced mayor's "spiritual guide." Ever since he was first elected mayor in 1978, Barry had always made at least some effort to govern with a biracial coalition. But after his arrest Barry wholeheartedly embraced the politics of racial grievance and victimization—and in Wilson he found the perfect ally. After his release from prison Barry plunged back into District politics; and with Wilson by his side—vouching for Barry's "spiritual renewal and reawakening" in one breath, blasting Barry's critics as the "Ku Klux Klan" in the next—Barry won back the mayor's office in 1994.

When Barry decided not to seek a fifth term in 1998, however, Wilson became a political free agent. And of all the mayoral candidates who courted him, it was Anthony Williams, the city's chief financial officer, who most assiduously lobbied the reverend for his support. Williams felt he needed Wilson to help him win over Washington's poor black residents, many of whom distrusted Williams because of his wonky demeanor (Barry's wife derisively called him "Mr. Bow Tie") and his frequent clashes with Barry. After Wilson endorsed Williams—and Williams won—the two seemed to coexist relatively well. But strains eventually developed. The final break came last year when Williams proposed shutting down inpatient services at D.C. General Hospital, a public hospital that was effectively bankrupt and offering low-quality care but enjoyed enormous support among the city's poorer residents. Wilson opposed Williams's move and ambushed him at a community forum on the proposed shutdown at Union Temple. "I was one of the most important people in his campaign," Wilson thundered from his church's pulpit. "Many people said, 'Rev, don't do it. The man doesn't care about people.' But I didn't listen to people. I found out for myself." The meeting ended with the mayor's security detail whisking him away from a mass of angry protesters.

It was fitting, then, that Wilson chose D.C. General as the site for his campaign's kickoff rally last week. On a brutally hot morning, about 200 people gathered on a parched lawn outside the hospital. It looked like a flashback to the late Barry era. Former Barry cronies—like defrocked Catholic priest George Stallings, New Black Panther Party head Malik Zulu Shabazz, and civil rights activist Lawrence Guyot—mingled among the crowd; go-go music blasted from the public-address system; even the green-and-white balloons and campaign signs—"VOICE OF THE PEOPLE!"—were reminiscent of the colors and slogans from past Barry campaigns. Three and a half years after Barry left office seemingly completely discredited, Barryism was not only alive and well—it

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seemed the only politically viable alternative to Williams that Washington could muster.

Wilson is a short but extremely thick man with a shaved head save for some grown-in sideburns and a goatee; he has a commanding presence. And he energized the crowd that morning with a Barry-like speech. "You deserve a leader who is not so consumed with building buildings that he overlooks building people," Wilson shouted, promising to "stand up and speak for the voiceless, the hopeless, the disappointed, the disgusted, and the hopeful people of our city." After the speech aides hustled Wilson into a cream-colored Cadillac, which headed for Williams's campaign headquarters. The new candidate wanted to hand deliver a letter demanding a series of head-to-head debates.

WILLIAMS, NOT SURPRISINGLY, has refused to grant Wilson's request. But the challenges posed by a write-in campaign, not to mention the incipient challenge from Wilson, have clearly lit a fire under the mayor. Ever since he was bumped from the ballot, Williams—who is often criticized for being aloof—has been a constant presence around the city. He's been out shaking hands at Metro stations practically every weekday morning and evening; he's schmoozed at senior-center ice cream socials; he's even laced up his sneakers and played basketball at a city playground. (Williams, who said he hadn't played the game in 35 or 40 years, shot one for eight, including three air balls and a shot that sailed over the backboard.)

One recent afternoon I caught up with the mayor as he campaigned at Fresh Fields, an upscale supermarket, in Washington's predominately white, predominantly wealthy Ward 3—a ward Williams won overwhelmingly four years ago. In the early days of the petition scandal, Ward 3, like much of the District, was hostile territory for Williams. "Some of my neighbors who supported him four years ago are threatening to stay home and not vote on Election Day," Eleanor Clift, a reliable arbiter of white Washington, wrote in an online article for *Newsweek*. But with Wilson's entrance into the race, this sentiment has mostly vanished. Faced with a possible return to Barryism, staying home on Election Day to punish Williams now looks to many white voters like a luxury they can no longer afford. And as Williams stumped amidst the exotic produce and organic cheeses, he was almost universally well-received. "I need your support on September Tenth," the mayor said to one middle-aged white man. "Of course," the man replied. "I'm so sorry what happened to you," a white woman picking over some tomatoes told the mayor.

The response at the supermarket bodes well for Williams's chances on September 10. Although whites make up only about 30 percent of Washington's population, they usually account for close to 45 percent of the vote; and in a write-in campaign, where a premium is put on voter literacy, affluent voters are particularly prized. But Williams seems to know that even if he could conceivably win by sweeping the white vote and picking up enough black votes to cobble together a majority, such an outcome would be a kind of defeat. Though the mayor has refused to grant interviews to the national press, I managed to slip in a few questions at Fresh Fields. What, I asked Williams, is his greatest fear other than losing? "That the campaign will be overly nasty and racially divisive," he replied. Williams said he feels he has begun to heal the racial rift left over from the Barry years, but he now worries that it might return. I asked him why he thinks he is unpopular with many of the city's poor, black voters. "You've got hard decisions I've had to make"—such as shutting down D.C. General—"and you've got personality," he said.

Williams's personality problems are never more evident than when he is campaigning among black voters. While his bookish demeanor and dry sense of humor tend to play well with affluent whites, they do not always receive a warm response from poor blacks, perhaps because the latter don't consider their problems to be abstract or laughing matters. Even more significantly, unlike Barry after his drug arrest, Williams seems profoundly uncomfortable playing the role of penitent that many black voters now expect him to assume.

But Williams is certainly trying. On Sunday mornings the mayor is now making the rounds at Washington's black churches. One recent Sunday I attended a service at the Scripture Cathedral, a black Pentecostal church in Washington's Shaw neighborhood, to see Williams in action. The huge, barn-like sanctuary was about three-quarters full that morning; and for an hour and a half the mayor sat in relative anonymity in the front-row pew as the church's various choirs sang an array of rousing hymns. Then, after a brief introduction from the church's pastor, Williams assumed the pulpit. He touted some of his administration's accomplishments, such as more affordable housing and lower unemployment, and he made a plug for his racial bona fides. "Don't any of you here ever think that ... one person can be blacker than another person," Williams said. "Because you know what? If I wasn't mayor of this city ... and I was standing around on the street at night trying to get a cab, I'd have just as hard a time getting a cab [as you]."

The bulk of Williams's sermon, though, was devoted to a parable. And while the church's pastor, in his own remarks, compared the mayor's plight to the Old Testament story of Joseph, Williams offered an awkward—and oddly secular—metaphor. The mayor talked about how he was captaining a big ocean liner—"the ship of state"—that was sailing along just fine until he heard a loud thump. One of the ship's deckhands said there was a problem but that everything was under control. Soon, though, the deckhand reported that the ship could no longer sail and that a helicopter was on its way to take Williams to his destination. But the helicopter failed to arrive, and the deckhand arranged for a lifeboat—only to discover that the lifeboat's engine did not work. "So here I am," Williams said with a sigh, "sitting in this little boat, the motor doesn't work, the helicopter didn't come, ... and it's getting stormy." No one in the church seemed to stir, but the mayor pressed on, his voice rising slightly. "Now we have to work together, and work and struggle and paddle through this storm." He looked out at the congregation. "We've got to reach that destination." ■

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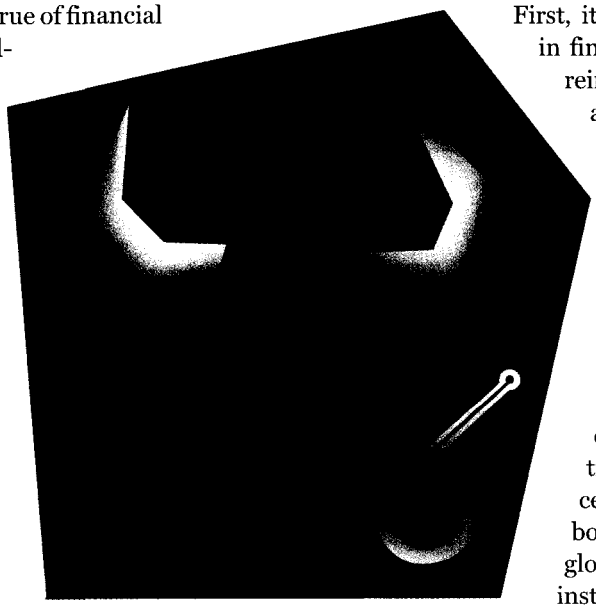
Why the markets can't fix themselves.

Busted

By GEORGE SOROS

THE WHOLE COUNTRY is up in arms about corporate abuse and financial wrongdoing. Our outrage is coupled with amazement: How could it have happened? Yet we shouldn't be amazed. The excesses of the 1990s boom and the clamor for reform that has accompanied the current bust are in fact a recurring feature of financial markets. What is truly amazing is that after so many boom/bust cycles we still do not properly understand how financial markets operate.

The prevailing wisdom holds that markets tend toward equilibrium—i.e., a price at which willing buyers and sellers balance each other out. That may be true of the market in widgets, but it is emphatically not true of financial markets. In financial markets a balance is difficult to reach because financial markets do not deal with known quantities; they try to discount a future that is contingent on how they discount it at present. What happens in financial markets can affect the economic "fundamentals" that those markets are supposed to reflect—which is why recent years have produced such a dramatic and seemingly irrational stock market rise, followed by an equally dramatic and seemingly irrational fall. Instead of a one-way connection between supply and demand via market prices, there is a two-way connection: Market prices can also alter the conditions of supply and demand in a circular fashion. In my 1987 book *The Alchemy of Finance*, I called this two-way connection "reflexivity." And I think it better explains the current turmoil in financial markets than the more commonly accepted idea of equilibrium.



Due to this two-way connection, it is impossible to determine where the equilibrium lies. Participants have to anticipate a future that is not only unknown but unknowable. The theory of reflexivity does not offer a new way of determining the outcome; it holds that the outcome is impossible to determine. For instance, it was predictable that the Internet bubble would burst, but it was impossible to predict when. There is a decision fork at every point along the way, and the actual course is determined only as the decisions are taken. Such a view undermines the scientific pretensions of economists. Scientific theories are supposed to explain and predict. Accepting reflexivity requires acknowledging that social science in general and economics in particular cannot provide scientifically valid predictions. This is a paradigm shift that has not occurred.

But even if reflexivity cannot yield firm predictions, it does have considerable explanatory power. First, it explains how the bias prevailing in financial markets can be either self-reinforcing or self-defeating. To create a bubble, the prevailing bias must be first self-reinforcing until it becomes unsustainable and turns self-reinforcing in the opposite direction (and thus self-defeating). All boom/bust sequences follow this pattern. Second, by recognizing that financial decisions cannot be based on firm predictions of the outcome, reflexivity draws attention to the formative role misconceptions play in the development of boom/bust sequences. In the conglomerate boom of the 1960s, for instance, the misconception was that growth in earnings per share is equally valuable whether it is achieved by internal growth or acquisitions. I remember vividly how, after the conglomerate boom's collapse, the president of Ogden Corporation (to whom I had sold my brother's engineering business) told me at lunch that the company's earnings were falling apart because "I have no audience to play to"—with the stock price down, he could no longer use that stock to acquire companies and thus magically boost earnings.

We are now in a similar situation. During the recent boom, corporations used every device at their disposal to boost earnings to satisfy the ever-rising expectations that sustained ever-rising stock prices. Clever financial engineers invented ever-new devices—and when they ran out of legitimate ones, some corporations turned to illegitimate ones. When the

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market turned, some of these illegitimate practices were exposed. For instance, Enron, like many companies, used special purpose entities (SPEs) to keep debts off its balance sheets. But unlike many other companies, it used its own stock to guarantee the debt of its SPE. When its stock price fell, the scheme unraveled and Enron was pushed into bankruptcy, exposing a number of other financial misdeeds the company had committed. The Enron bankruptcy reinforced the downtrend in the stock market, which led to further bankruptcies and news of further corporate and individual misdeeds. Both this downtrend and the clamor for corrective action gathered momentum in a self-reinforcing fashion—just as reflexivity envisions.

THERE IS NOTHING surprising about this course of events. It has happened many times before. The real surprise is that we are surprised. After all, many of the practices that are now condemned were carried on quite openly. Everybody knew that the best companies, such as General Electric and Microsoft, were massaging the numbers to maintain the appearance of a steady progression of earnings. Indeed, investors put a premium on management's ability to do just that. SPEs could be bought off the shelf, and investment banks maintained structured finance departments to provide custom-made designs. Tyco's management proudly proclaimed that they could generate earnings growth by acquiring companies, some of which could be moved offshore by virtue of Tyco's Bermuda incorporation, and investors put a high multiple on its earnings. Stock options were not only accepted but considered a useful device for boosting shareholders' values since they provided executive compensation without incurring any costs and encouraged management to focus on the stock price above all other considerations.

If there is a major difference between today's crisis and, say, the late '60s conglomerate boom—where investors also rewarded per-share-earnings growth without regard to how it was achieved—it is a difference of scope. The conglomerate boom involved only a segment of the stock market—the conglomerates and the companies they acquired—and a segment of the investing public, spearheaded by the so-called "go-go" funds. When the conglomerates began to threaten the overall financial establishment, that establishment closed ranks against them. By contrast, the '90s boom encompassed the entire corporate and investment community, and today's establishment, including today's political establishment, was fully complicit. Enron, WorldCom, and Arthur Andersen could not have gotten away with their nefarious activities without encouragement and active reinforcement from virtually all sectors of American society—their corporate peers, investment professionals, politicians, the media, and the public at large. Whereas the conglomerate boom ended because of resistance from the establishment, in this case the boom was allowed to run its course, and the search for corrective measures started only after the collapse. Even now, a pro-business administration is trying to downplay the damage. In looking for remedies, it is not enough to make an example of a few offenders. We are all implicated and must all reexamine our view of the world.

ACCORDING TO THE theory of reflexivity, misconceptions or flawed ideas are generally responsible, at least in part, for most boom/bust sequences. Analyzing what went wrong in the '90s, we can identify two specific elements: a decline in professional standards and a dramatic rise in conflicts of interest. And both are really symptoms of the same broader problem: the glorification of financial gain irrespective of how it is achieved. The professions—lawyers, accountants, auditors, security analysts, corporate officers, and bankers—allowed the pursuit of profit to trump long-standing professional values. Security analysts promoted stocks to gain investment-banking business; bankers, lawyers, and auditors aided and abetted deceptive practices for the same reason. Similarly, conflicts of interest were ignored in the mad dash for profits. While only a small number of people committed acts that actually qualify as criminal, many more engaged in activities that in retrospect appear dubious and misleading. They did so thanks to reassuring legal opinions, Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP), and the comforting knowledge that everybody else was doing the same. When broad principles are minutely codified—as they are in the GAAP—the rules paradoxically become easier to evade. A whole industry was born, called structured finance, largely devoted to rule evasion. Once a financial innovation was successfully introduced it was eagerly imitated, and the limits of the acceptable were progressively pushed out by aggressive or unscrupulous practitioners. A process of natural selection was at work: Those who refused to be swayed were pushed to the sidelines; those leading the process could not see the danger signs because they were carried away by their own success and the reinforcement they received from others. As a source told *The Financial Times*, "They couldn't see the iceberg because they were standing on top of it."

Underlying this indiscriminate pursuit of financial success was a belief that the common interest is best served by allowing people to pursue their narrow self-interest. In the nineteenth century this was called "laissez-faire," but since most of its current adherents don't speak French, I have given it a more contemporary name: market fundamentalism. Market fundamentalism became dominant around 1980, when Ronald Reagan was elected president in the United States and shortly after Margaret Thatcher was chosen as prime minister in the United Kingdom. Its goal was to remove regulation and other forms of government intervention from the economy and to promote the free movement of capital and entrepreneurship both domestically and internationally. The globalization of financial markets was a market-fundamentalist project, and it made remarkable headway before its shortcomings were exposed.

Market fundamentalism is a false and dangerous ideology. It is false on at least two counts. First, it profoundly misapprehends the way financial markets operate. It assumes that

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markets tend toward equilibrium and that equilibrium assures the optimum allocation of resources. Academic economists have proceeded far beyond general equilibrium—multiple equilibriums are all the rage now—but market fundamentalists continue to believe they have solid science behind them, not just economics but also Charles Darwin's theory of survival of the fittest. Second, by equating private interests with the public interest, market fundamentalism endows the pursuit of self-interest with a moral quality.

But if financial markets do not tend toward equilibrium, as the theory of reflexivity maintains, private interests cannot be equated with the public interest. Left to their own devices, financial markets are liable to go to socially disruptive extremes.

The fallacy of endowing the market mechanism with a moral quality goes deeper still. What distinguishes markets is exactly that they are *amoral*—that is to say, moral considerations do not find expression in market prices. That is because efficient markets by definition have so many participants that no single one can affect the market price. Even if some participants are held back by moral scruples, others will take their place at only marginally different prices. For instance, moralists cannot prevent alcohol and tobacco companies from raising capital on more or less the same terms as not-so-sinful enterprises. As a consequence, anonymous market participants need not be overly concerned with the social consequences of their actions because those consequences are so marginal. The amorality of financial markets is one of the factors that contribute to their efficiency: It allows participants to be single-minded about maximizing their returns without regard to the social consequences. (Of course the concept of efficient markets is only an abstraction. In reality many large participants are not anonymous and their decisions may sway others.) It is exactly because markets are amoral that we cannot leave the allocation of resources entirely to them. Society cannot hold together without some consideration of the common interest. If private interests cannot be equated with the public interest, the public interest must be given expression in some other way than through the market.

HERE WE MUST draw a distinction between rulemaking and playing by the rules. As market participants, we may pursue our self-interest as long as we play by the rules. But as rulemakers we must be guided by the common interest—and in a democracy we are all rulemakers. By claiming that the public interest is best served by allowing people to pursue their self-interest, market fundamentalists have erased the distinction. Those who subscribe to this convenient ideology have no compunction about bending the rules to their own advantage. The result is not perfect competition but crony capitalism, where the rich and powerful feel morally justified in enjoying their privileged position.

The dangers of market fundamentalism are particularly evident in the international arena. The development of our international financial institutions has not kept pace with the growth of global financial markets. As a result we have seen several major international financial crises since 1980. Their impact on our economy has been relatively modest because whenever a crisis threatened our prosperity the Federal Reserve intervened aggressively—as with the Long Term Capital Management crisis in 1998. But many other countries—Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Thailand, Indonesia, Korea, Russia—have been devastated, some more than once. Instead of recognizing that financial markets are inherently unstable and bigger markets require stronger public institutions to maintain stability, market fundamentalists have reached the opposite conclusion: They blame the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for the instability. They claim that the IMF rescue packages have created a "moral hazard" by encouraging markets to extend more credit than they would have otherwise. Yielding to market-fundamentalist pressure, the IMF has reversed its policy from bailouts to "bail-ins"—in which the private sector must make concessions as well. Since investment banks are not motivated by charity, they want to be paid for their part of the bail-in burden—which means higher interests, which further undermines a developing country's economic growth.

THE CHANGE IN IMF policy in the aftermath of the emerging-market crisis of 1997 to 1999 has increased the cost of capital going to debtor countries. As a result, recent years have seen a reverse flow of capital from the periphery to the center as demonstrated by America's ever-increasing current account deficit, which now exceeds $400 billion or 4 percent of GDP. This has the makings of another bubble that must eventually burst, although the timing cannot be predicted. The recent weakening of the dollar is an ominous sign, especially as the main alternatives—the euro and the yen—are not particularly attractive. The financial crisis in Brazil is even more threatening. From the market-fundamentalist perspective, Brazil has done everything right; yet its bonds today yield more than 20 percent in dollar terms, and no country can live with such high interest rates. After the Bush administration reversed its previous opposition, the IMF recently put together a large, $30 billion bailout package, but the markets were not impressed. Having been told about moral hazard and private-sector burden-sharing, they are determined to avoid it. After a brief rally, yields settled back at more than 20 percent. By imposing such high interest rates, financial markets are engaging in a self-fulfilling prophecy that is making Brazil insolvent. If Brazil fails, the international financial system as currently constituted has failed. Global financial markets have created an uneven playing field that cannot be sustained in its present form.

There is an urgent need to reform the system by strengthening the IMF's function as lender of last resort to countries that cannot get private-sector credit and by encouraging developing countries to pursue more domestic-led growth, which will lessen their dependence on U.S.-led growth. This will require far-reaching institutional changes, but there is no sign that the Bush administration and others in economic

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authority recognize the need—partly because they remain beholden to market-fundamentalist thinking.

In the international arena, as in the domestic, market fundamentalism assumes that the collective pursuit of private interest produces economic stability. But as today's turmoil shows, the lack of ethical principles and social concerns—whether among governments or accountants—creates enormous *instability*. Values are shaped by exactly the same reflexive process as market prices. As I explained earlier, there is a two-way connection between values and economic fundamentals (the economic performance of companies and governments) on the one hand and market prices on the other. There is the "normal" connection studied in economic theory by which the supply and demand curves determine prices; there is also an inverse, reflexive connection by which market developments have repercussions on the participants' values and the so-called fundamentals. The more susceptible the participants' values are to market developments, the more unstable the system becomes. Firmly held ethical, professional, and social principles serve as an anchor, keeping financial markets stable. Conditions then approximate those stipulated by economic theory: The values are more or less independent of markets, and the outcome is a more or less stable equilibrium. But when people pursue financial success without regard for other considerations, they become willing participants in initially self-reinforcing but eventually self-defeating processes.

This is exactly what has happened in the recent boom/bust cycle. Warren Buffett and a few others refused to be swayed by the irrational exuberance of the '90s and continued to base their decisions on the fundamentals of economic performance. But the vast majority of investors were swept away by a self-reinforcing tide, and many people who had never previously invested in stocks got sucked in. The removal of restrictions stimulated entrepreneurial and inventive talents; shareholders' interests took precedence over other considerations. The exuberance was not entirely irrational. Only when the fundamentals could not keep up with the expectations did the process become unsustainable. That is when ethical and professional principles failed to keep the process within bounds.

The argument about stability is relevant not only to financial markets but to society at large. As we have seen, financial markets are amoral, whereas society cannot remain stable without some shared values. Although amorality renders financial markets efficient, it also renders them inhuman. Some sense of humanity must be introduced through the political process—even if it means sacrificing some efficiency, as measured in GDP. That is the fundamental insight that American politics has been missing. Market fundamentalists have managed to convince themselves and others that the proper objective of policy is to protect markets from regulation in the interests of efficiency and economic growth. They point to the failure of socialism in all its forms. But this argument is based on faulty logic. It does not follow from the fact that regulations are imperfect that unregulated markets are perfect. The fact is, all human constructs, including markets, are imperfect in one way or another; perfection is beyond our reach. That is where fundamentalist beliefs, including market fundamentalism, are always wrong: They lay claim to ultimate truth.

To be sure, in developing a new regulatory framework we must remember that regulations are liable to be even more imperfect than markets. They need a feedback mechanism that allows mistakes to be corrected. That is what makes regulated markets superior to central planning. In the absence of feedback either from markets or from free speech and free elections, there is no limit to how far governments can go wrong. But democracy can keep the excesses of government within bounds, just as government can contain the excesses of the financial markets.

In the last two decades or so—and particularly since the '90s—we have given financial markets too much free rein. We have allowed corporations to maximize profits to the detriment of considerations like equality of opportunity, environmental protection, and maintenance of the social safety net. Professional standards have broken down, and conflicts of interest have proliferated. Correcting these deficiencies will require stronger government intervention. Interestingly, the measure that is likely to be most effective in clearing the air is the recent directive issued by the SEC requiring the chief executive and financial officers of the 947 largest companies to certify their accounts dating back to the beginning of the previous fiscal year. The officers could be held criminally liable if the accounts do not give a fair representation of the company's financial condition—even if they are in conformity with the GAAP. The directive is sufficiently vague so that the officers are likely to err on the side of caution and reveal all questionable practices. It reasserts the supremacy of broad principles over particular rules. In doing so it harks back to the glory days of the SEC pre-dating Mike Milken when principles like insider trading and stock manipulation were not yet codified by court decisions.

Legislation is only part of the answer. Changes in the law must be accompanied by a fundamental change of attitude. In the last analysis, professional standards can be maintained only by the professions themselves, and conflicts of interest can be avoided only if people recognize a common interest other than self-interest. Without such a change of heart, new regulation and new legislation will only encourage more evasion.

It is unrealistic to expect that all market participants will suddenly undergo such an ethical conversion. But public opinion and public discourse—as we saw in the '90s—can have a dramatic impact on individual behavior. Americans must relearn the difference between a collection of individuals each pursuing his or her self-interest and a society of people guided by the public interest. How well Americans relearn that difference may well determine whether this country and the world return to economic stability and prosperity in the months and years to come. ■

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Kinds of Love

ALICE'S COMMENT ON her changes in Wonderland—"Curiouser and curiouser!"—also fits the changes in Neil LaBute's career. His first two films, *In the Company of Men* and *Your Friends and Neighbors*, were hard, tight anatomies of male chauvinism. His third film, *Nurse Betty*, which he directed but did not write, was quite different: a dreamy portrait of a young woman and her passion for a soap-opera star. For the theater, more or less simultaneously with the above, he wrote *Bash*, a trio of (his term) "latterday" one-act plays that obliquely exposed cruelty in seemingly bland persons, as well as *The Shape of Things*, a relatively conventional sexual gavotte. Now, back in the film world, he presents still another change: a romance—two in one, in fact. **Possession** (Focus), adapted from an A. S. Byatt novel (unread by me), braids a Victorian and a modern love story. Variety certainly is spicing LaBute's life.

Another novelty: collaborators. LaBute co-wrote the new screenplay with David Henry Hwang, author of *M. Butterfly*, and Laura Jones, screenwriter of *An Angel at My Table* and *Angela's Ashes*. Obviously we can't know who wrote what in *Possession*, but the dialogue in each time strand—1859 and now—is apt and taking. Curiously, it is the film's overall structure that is problematic. Occasionally we get the feeling that a collaborator had concentrated chiefly on the section that was his or her concern, with less attention to the connections.

By now, numerous films have had narratives in different time strands, but the picture that *Possession* reminded me of most strongly was *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1981). LaBute's lovers, past and present, are not played by the same actors, as was done in the earlier film, but once again modes of relationship are juxtaposed, in part to ask whether there are any constant truths about love. The very fact that the question exists is still disturbing.

The stories in *Possession* grow out of literary research. Roland is an American fellowship assistant to a famous British professor. In a London library, he discovers a love letter written by the famous (fictitious) Victorian poet Randolph Henry Ash to another (fictitious) poet, Christabel LaMotte. Roland sees that the letter can help advance his academic career, steals it, then goes up to Lincoln to meet a young professor, Maud Bailey, who is, as they say, working on LaMotte. Spurred by the letter, they follow literary trails. Complexities develop between Roland and Maud, and very soon the lives of Randolph and Christabel become visible to us. Both stories grow as the modern pair uncover more and more material about the earlier pair. The affair between the Victorians is much more knotted because Randolph is married and Christabel has a devoted lesbian lover. In fact, one of the film's ironies is that the troubles of the earlier pair are much more grave than the relatively abstruse troubles of the modern pair, with their contemporary lunges, retreats, and returns generated by today's views of pride and commitment. Also, we sense that the modern pair is conscious of cliché in their relationship in a way that the earlier pair could not be; so, in a sense, aesthetic judgment affects the way that Roland and Maud behave with each other.

Some episodes in the two stories are creaky—for instance, the modern pair get involved in a cemetery robbery that ends in a fistfight—but, though the joinings are fuzzy, the scenes between each of the two couples are first-class. The Victorians' language rings melodically, in contrast to the exchanges of the pair today, which are sharp, sometimes quite moving, and often witty. (One morning, after an evening when Roland and Maud started to make love but he decided against it, Roland is quite moody. Maud says, "I wonder what you're like after you actually do sleep with someone.") All these scenes are gems in a setting that is lesser.

The moral questions in the contiguous stories are as clear as the differences in courting. With Randolph and Christabel, the question is fidelity—his to his wife, hers to her ladyfriend. With Roland and Maud, the question is ambition versus honesty. Their whole acquaintance is based on theft—first his of the original letter, then they both steal an envelope from a Paris library, something that Randolph and Christabel would never have done. (Since this Paris theft is blatant, oughtn't the French to have done something about it?)

But the effect of the film is like that of old-fashioned opera: the arias and the duets are affecting even though the overall story is wobbly. Those scenes bloom because the four leading performances are engrossing in themselves. Jeremy Northam (of *The Winslow Boy*) as Randolph and Jennifer Ehle (of *Sunshine* and *Wilde*) as Christabel play their roles as people to whom romanticism is a kind of responsibility. Aaron Eckhart (of LaBute's three previous films) makes Roland unostentatiously attractive, with a miraculously unchanging three-day stubble. Gwyneth Paltrow is enchanting as Maud. When Paltrow assumes an English accent, as she did in *Shakespeare in Love*, she is transformed in every aspect of her acting. (A coincidence of note: the two leading women are daughters of exceptional actresses. Ehle's mother is Rosemary Harris, Paltrow's is Blythe Danner.)

All these performances must owe much to LaBute, who has put them in perfect pitch and pace. His blendings of past and present settings are dexterous. For instance, Maud and Roland, in search of Randolph-Christabel material, are driving along, go beneath a railroad underpass, and leave the screen. The camera then pans up to the tracks above, where an 1859 train is chugging along. The story continues in a railway car with Randolph and Christabel. Luckily for the film, the cinematographer was Jean Yves Escoffier, who apparently knows the kind of Victorian painting (as in Caillebotte) that transforms a street scene into a theater moment; here Escoffier continues the process. The production designer was Luciana Arrighi, who did *Howards End*, *The Remains of the Day*, and *Sense and Sensibility*, and who once again entrances us. Claire Simpson, veteran editor for the fiercely different Oliver Stone, moves subtly and gracefully here. The composer Gabriel Yared (*The English Patient*) writes particularly well for the anguished Victorian scenes.

These gifted people, and more, have produced a film full of attractions. If it isn't completely realized, those attractions are still treasures.

The Kid Stays in the Picture (USA) is irritating and interesting. This is a docu-

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mentary about Robert Evans, former film star, former studio chief, former flop, once again a producer. Evans narrates. He is also plentifully on screen, in clips from films and news shots. As a portrait of self-absorption, self-admiration, self-solace, and, on balance, self-justification, this picture is unbeatable. Evans is so brassily sincere about it all, with a slightly moldy sincerity, that his picture—a one-man circus, with the ringmaster also a trapezist and a clown—is naggingly entertaining. How unlike him we are, we are grateful to think, truly enough: but at least his life confirms our belief.

Evans was an ex-child actor and a young success in the clothing business when Norma Shearer saw him sunning by a Hollywood pool and tapped him to play her late husband, Irving Thalberg, in a film that was about to start. He got more roles. (Once, when members of a cast objected to him, the producer sent a wire: "The kid stays in the picture.") Still more roles followed, many women, a marriage to Ali McGraw that Steve McQueen torpedoed, a term as head of Paramount, where—Evans says—he was responsible for such hits as *Love Story* and *The Godfather*, followed by enough duds to do him in. Then, after a journey through cocaine, a return to activity.

Surely another documentary could be made that would add to or adjust every story in this film. But who would care? Evans's solipsism is perfect for him and for his milieu. What he exemplifies in a (partly) unconscious way is a skewing by Hollywood values. The pictures stay in the kid. ■

The Power and the Story

By NICHOLAS LEMANN

The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Master of the Senate by Robert A. Caro

(Alfred A. Knopf, 1,167 pp., $35)

ROBERT CARO PUBLISHED *The Power Broker*, his biography of Robert Moses (the original manuscript length, he reports a little boastfully in *Master of the Senate*, was 3,300 pages), in 1974. Since then he has been at work on one enormous project that has taken him from the fading of youth to the approach of old age, a biography of Lyndon Johnson. Caro has a single-mindedness that is unique among non-fiction writers—I can't think of a time that I have seen his byline in a periodical over these twenty-eight years, except on excerpts from forthcoming books—and a thoroughness that would be rare even in an academic expert on a specific topic. He is proceeding through Johnson's adult life at an almost real-time pace. *Master of the Senate* has been published twelve years after the previous volume of the biography, *Means of Ascent*, and it is meant to cover Johnson's career in the Senate, which also lasted twelve years. But this statistic makes Caro look quicker than he is. *Master of the Senate* deals with the last three years of Johnson's twelve years in the Senate in a single chapter that begins on page 1,015. *Means of Ascent*, at 522 pages the shortest of the three Johnson volumes published thus far, covered seven years, and came out eight years after the first volume, *The Path to Power*, and was also quite truncated. It cannot be considered certain that Caro will get to all the great events of Johnson's presidency, which must have been what drew him to this biography in the first place.

There is no mystery, no tantalizing hint of offstage creative torment, that lies behind the extraordinary length and deliberateness of this work. To read it is to understand it immediately. Caro does his research, quite obviously, with the goal of getting as close as possible to complete knowledge. His subject was evidently both prodigious and megalomaniacal, and so the volume of material in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library is extremely large. Caro seems to have plowed through a great deal of it, maybe even all of it, and to have worked in several other manuscript collections, and to have done hundreds of interviews, and to have made a full scan of contemporary press coverage of the events that he is covering, and to have read the significant secondary literature that is in book form. (If there exists information that he does not possess, it would be whatever is uniquely stored in the heads of the Johnson people who are not cooperating with Caro's project, who include most of the Johnson family and former aides such as Bill Moyers and Harry McPherson.) The invisible part of the work of such a writer is collating and organizing all the research material, which is a slow, painstaking task that many writers skip or abbreviate. Not Caro. Evidently every scrap of good stuff gets notecarded and categorized, so that usually when he makes a point he produces not one but several supporting examples, drawn from different places.

AND THEN THE writing unfolds in a distinctively drawn-out way. Caro's prose calls to mind the work of the star journalistic writers of mid-century America, William Shirer and John Gunther and Theodore White, or even, more faintly, that of middlebrow broad-canvas novelists of the same period such as John Steinbeck or Pearl S. Buck—or even the old "March of Time" newsreels. Caro's writing is not post-ironic, it is pre-ironic (and definitely non-ironic), self-consciously "big," thunderingly moralistic, and dramatic verging on melodramatic. Caro's approach is neither intellectual, if that means interested in ideas, nor scholarly, if that means writing in the context of other work on the same subject. He is aiming instead for an epic, almost scriptural effect. Every chapter builds relentlessly to a climax and ends with a neat moral. The importance of everything is forcefully insisted upon and closely spelled out.

People in Caro, and even institutions and inanimate objects, have a single salient characteristic, or maybe two, which

NICHOLAS LEMANN writes "Letter from Washington" for *The New Yorker*.

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every detail offered about them must support. The Senate is characterized by "restraint and dignity," so therefore the architecture of the Senate Office Building (now the Russell Senate Office Building) is restrained and dignified, too—not just in general but, by means of Caro's hard-selling prose, in every particular. "The entablature of the Senate Building is unbroken by a single decoration: on its entire length there is not a single carving of a leaf or an acorn or a bird—stretching down Constitution is nothing but a long, broad band of gleaming white marble, with, above it, only the simplest narrow classic egg and dart molding, and that simple balustrade." (Caro does admit in passing that the original office building for the unrestrained and undignified House has a blank entablature, too.) Every moment, every touch, is wrung for everything it is worth.

The Caro method can be spellbindingly vivid, as in this passage about Johnson as Senate majority leader working a row of old-fashioned phone booths in the cloakroom before a vote:

> Often, while he was talking to one senator, a call he needed to take immediately would come in on another line. A clerk would tap timidly on the door of the booth in which Johnson was talking, and tell him the other senator was ready. Stepping out of the booth, the telephone still in his hand, the cord stretching with him, Johnson would reach into the other booth and take that receiver, and then stand between the two booths, with the cords stretching out from them to his hands. Or he might want to talk to two or three or even four of his "players"—senators with disagreements about the same amendment—at the same time, and he talked to them at the same time, on two or three or four phones, standing in the narrow aisle between the two rows of phone booths with a receiver, or two receivers, grasped in each big hand, talking first into one receiver, then into another, long black cords stretching out from his tall figure in all directions.

But the Caro method can also be, and often is, simply corny. Thus Caro gets from a biography of Hubert Humphrey that Humphrey sometimes cried while driving home from work, and turns it into this:

> In the evening, after the Senate day, he would get into his old Buick and drive home to Chevy Chase. And sometimes, driving home, he would cry—Hubert Humphrey, the youngest, and perhaps the best, mayor in the history of Minneapolis, elected to the Senate at the age of thirty-seven in a landslide, Hubert Humphrey who had brought a Democratic convention to its feet with the greatest speech since the Cross of Gold, Hubert Humphrey, as brave as any David who ever faced a Goliath, driving up Connecticut Avenue in the stream of rush-hour cars, with tears running down his face.

Lyndon Johnson by Zach Trenholm for The New Republic

To put it mildly, *Master of the Senate* could have been a lot shorter. There could have been two or three fewer examples to support each point. Great events of the 1950s in which Johnson played a minimal part—the Truman-MacArthur conflict, the fall of Joseph McCarthy, the early days of the civil rights movement in the South—might not have been awarded entire chapters. Opportunities for Caro to go into prosecutorial mode against Johnson might not have been exploited quite so fully: one chapter, maybe, on one of the most shameful episodes of Johnson's career—the hounding out of office of the head of the Federal Power Commission, Leland Olds, on behalf of his Texas oil-baron backers—instead of three. And three chapters might not have been completely necessary for the miniature history of the Senate with which Caro opens the book, especially since much of it is based on decades-old and no longer much respected sources that comport well with his moral didacticism, such as John F. Kennedy's *Profiles in Courage* and Matthew Josephson's *The Politicos*. Even the book's climactic set-piece, an account of the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1957, probably did not require seven chapters totaling nearly two hundred pages.

But with Caro you are in the hands of someone who sees life, or at least the lives of his subjects, operatically—and not light-operatically, either. He writes like a man who believes that the power of the effect that he achieves is dependent on (to mix musical metaphors) his pulling out every possible stop. And he is not exactly wrong. Nobody comes close to Caro in his relentless determination to take the material as far as it will possibly go. But deftness is not in his repertoire. He is not one of those writers who can get business done by understatement and artful omission. He understands the world, and then spins it back out again for his readers, in the form of high-contrast superlatives.

Its stagy grandeur notwithstanding, the story that Caro has come to tell is a fairly simple one. Lyndon Johnson, elected to the Senate by a whisker in 1948 on his second try, enters a body ruled by its Southern members, who use their seniority, their solidarity, and their death grip on the Senate's rules and procedures (especially the proscription on ending filibusters) to block liberal legislation in general and civil rights legislation in particular. Johnson makes himself into

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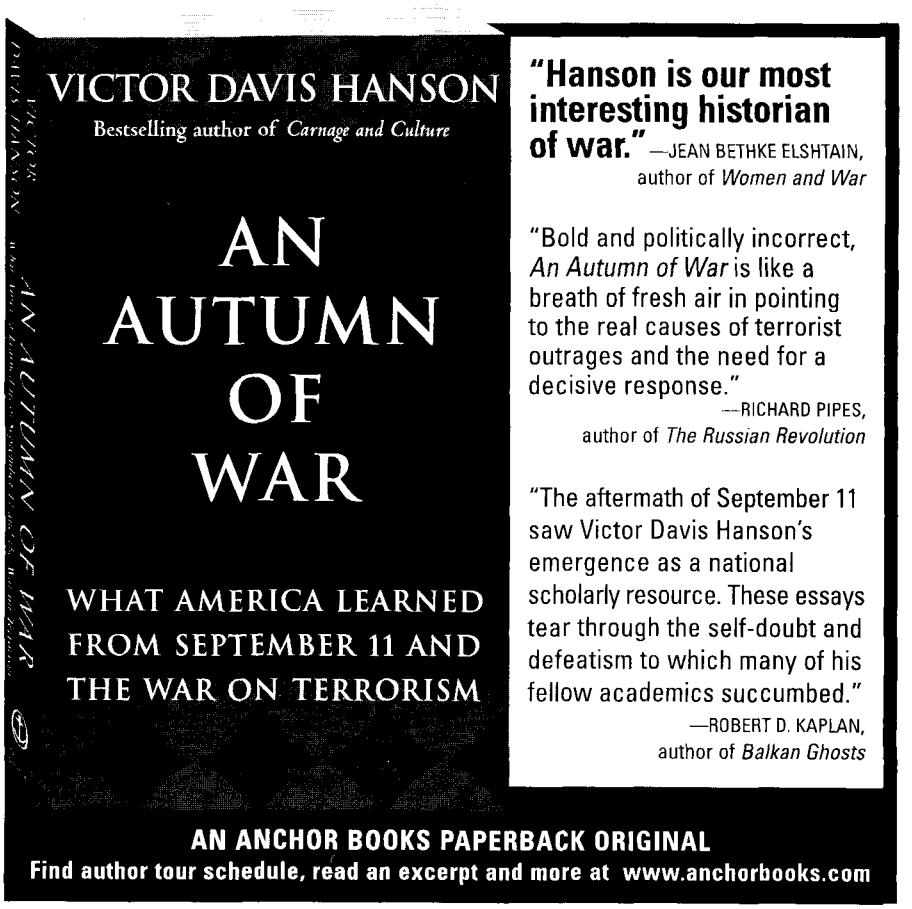
the surrogate son of the Southern caucus's most influential member, Richard Russell of Georgia, just as when he was a member of the House of Representatives he had made himself into the surrogate son of the speaker, another lonely Southern bachelor, Sam Rayburn of Texas. Russell's patronage and a few lucky twists of electoral fortune enable Johnson to become the Senate's minority leader while still in his first term, and its majority leader in the first year of his second term. Then Johnson's own legislative genius enables him to turn what had been a job that was not as important as it sounds (the reason he was able to get it as such a junior member is that it was not considered a prize on the order of a committee chairmanship) into almost a kingship. Johnson is desperately ambitious to be elected president, and he realizes that he cannot accomplish this from a position as the fair-haired boy of the Senate's Southern caucus. Instead he has to become plausibly national while maintaining his Southern base. He does this by cultivating a few liberal Northern Democrats such as Humphrey, and by positioning himself on the issues with great care so as never to alienate either group completely. His crowning achievement in nationalizing himself is getting the Senate to vote yes on a civil rights bill in 1957, for the first time since Reconstruction.

Although Caro occasionally refers to Johnson's "labyrinthine personality" or his "deep contradictions," his psychological theory of the case is simple, too. Johnson's Rosebud, in Caro's telling, is the descent of his parents from rural prominence into poverty when he was growing up. Eternally haunted by the fear of failure, Caro's Johnson has a politician's characteristics pushed to the extreme: he is more ambitious, more manipulative, more dominating, more in need of acclaim than anybody else in his world. Caro presents Johnson as having almost superhuman abilities, but a perfectly rotten character. He is a terrible husband, father, and boss, a toady to those above him and a tyrant to those below, and duplicitous to the greatest extent that he can get away with. On the other hand, he has basically good instincts—meaning, to Caro, liberal in the 1950s Americans for Democratic Action or Eleanor Roosevelt sense. And in any conflict between Johnson's ambition and Johnson's instincts, his ambition will win.

When the service of his ambition requires Johnson to be conservative (which is often, given the power of the right in Texas and of the South in the Senate), he is a force for bad in the world—really, really bad. (In one extreme case, Caro describes Johnson plying an alcoholic senator named Virgil Chapman with booze in order to control him more fully, and then reports that during this period Chapman died in a late-night auto accident.) But when being liberal is the way to get ahead, as in the case of the Civil Rights Act, he becomes a force for good—really, really good: "Did those sixteen million Americans [African Americans as an undifferentiated corpus, that is, who do not get to have any fun at all in *Master of the Senate* because they are so completely devoted to suffering nobly] need a mighty champion in the halls of government? They were about to get one." Caro makes Johnson sound like a textbook manic-depressive, though he doesn't use that term, and describes him in a manic-depressive voice, with regular bipolar switches from extreme approval to extreme disapproval. Because Johnson at each moment of the narrative is defined by one entirely positive or entirely negative characteristic, "complexity" is conveyed by having him abruptly switch from one to the other.

Given these partially self-imposed limitations, Caro does amazingly well with his material. Legislatures in action are difficult to understand: try wandering into the Senate or House gallery on an ordinary day and figuring out what's going on. Everything turns on procedure and maneuver: rules, calendars, committee assignments, amendments. It is no wonder that the presidency, which is a much simpler institution, is Washington's master narrative—it is doubtful that Caro would have been able to devote a quarter of a century to exploring the American legislature if he did not have as protective cover the idea that he was writing a presidential biography; and it is no wonder that many other masters of the Senate besides Johnson have had trouble converting their stature in that institution into national political popularity when they have run for president. But Caro's general immersion in his subject and his unappeasable drive to chase down every detail have together brought the Senate to life. Its leading characters—Russell and Humphrey and Estes Kefauver and Paul Douglas and so on—feel, by the end, like people you know.

Caro makes comprehensible the way in which this bill's fate depends on a deal made in another realm and that bill's fate depends on the imaginative use of an obscure maneuver. He gives a sense of who in the press could be hoodwinked (*The New York Times*'s William S. White) and who could not (Evans and Novak, believe it or not), and, more generally, of the Washington press's eternal uncritical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worship of success and status. He knows which interest groups had clout and which did not. There is a level of comfortable familiarity with Washington that makes watching politics fun—the junkie's level at which you know that Don Nickles is the most important off-the-reservation conservative in the Senate, or that if a possible presidential candidate appears on *Meet the Press* the stakes are higher than they would be if the appearance were on *Face the Nation*. It is very hard to get to that level for a period that has passed, because the renown of most Washington big shots fades so rapidly after they have retired. Caro, to his great credit, has managed to re-create not just the Senate in the 1950s, but Washington as a whole. The physical feeling of the place, the way people talked, what they wore, what they ate and drank, how they carried themselves—Caro gets all of it. In the case of Johnson, although the recapturing is mostly exterior, you can practically smell the guy. (He smells like Sta-Comb, Cutty Sark, and stale tobacco.) You know that if Johnson does X, Joe Rauh will say Y, and Doris Fleeson will write A, and Senator Lister Hill will do Z. That is an impressive literary achievement, and the too-muchness of the account is in part the price we pay for it.

OVER THE YEARS I have occasionally encountered politicians who were using Caro's biography of Johnson as a kind of handbook, a step-by-step guide to the climbing of the government ladder. That is a sign of Caro's strength as a writer, and of his weakness. Politicians tend to divide journalists into two categories: idiots who matter and idiots who can be safely ignored; and only very rarely do they find writing about what they do to be descriptive, let alone instructive. Caro's books meet that difficult test. That Caro can be read as a dispenser of inside wisdom, on the other hand, shows that it is easy to factor out, or to read in the opposite of the way intended, his animadversions on the evils of political "ambition."

Every serious writer has distinctive obsessions, and they are always overdetermined. Caro's Lyndon Johnson, the poor son of deep-rural Texas, is quite a similar character to Caro's Robert Moses, the Ivy League German Jew from Connecticut. They are both big-time government doers, nearly superhuman in their abilities, workaholic, monstrous, dominating, obsessed with the getting and the using of "power," and prone to flipping back and forth between good and evil. Caro's blowtorch-intense interest in, and disapproval of, these people is a little like an anti-pornography crusader's righteous preoccupation with the horrifying details of his quarry, especially since Caro himself is, within his reference group, larger than life in many of the same ways as his subjects, as one can see immediately just by hefting one of his books or glancing at the thundering opening passages. Caro's attitude toward Johnson and toward the larger theme of "power" (at least when exercised by Johnson) is a little too raw to be entirely within his authorial control. The second-order characters, such as Richard Russell, tend to feel more real than Johnson himself, and Caro's account of how politics and government are practiced displays a veracity, even an enthusiasm, when Johnson is not at center stage that diminishes somewhat when Johnson's presence requires him to move to the extremes of praise or condemnation.

WHAT CARO DOES not do, therefore, is provide a coherent standard for judging politicians. What is this "power" that Johnson craves, anyway? Caro gets himself off the hook of having to define it by extravagantly admiring the accomplishment of any item that is on the liberal agenda—any item that serves the cause of "social justice"—and treating all other signs of political adeptness as base and ignoble. Of Johnson's devising the defeat of the isolationist Bricker Amendment, Caro remarks: "Grand in scale, this overarching political plan that he had conceived down on the ranch in a flash of inspiration had proved to be a political masterstroke." But when Johnson arranges for the body of a Mexican-American war hero from Texas to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery and then abruptly turns off his publicity-seeking machinery when he realizes that the action is not playing well with Anglo Texans, the lesson is that "his empathy and tenderness for people oppressed simply because their skins were dark, strong though it was in his makeup, was not as strong as his need for power."

As Caro's own wonderfully copious evidence makes clear, political life is more complicated than that. Lots of senators, then and now, want very badly to be president. Surely none of them, even Hubert Humphrey, has ever wanted it solely to help others and not at all for status and glory. None of them can get there without courting interest groups or without moving, on many issues, from an original instinctive position to a compromise. None of them is free of the struggle to reconcile regional interests and national interests. The Southern president after Johnson, Jimmy Carter, though now remembered as a naïve saint, so angered the liberal wing of the Democratic Party that Ted Kennedy ran against him in 1980 rather than accede to his re-nomination. And the next one after that, Bill Clinton, helped to found the Democratic Leadership Council as a way of getting himself off the hook from which Johnson spent his life dangling.

Caro tends to be understanding of political exigency when it is exemplified by anyone who isn't Johnson, and admiring of it even in Johnson during pro-Johnson turns in the plot. Dwight Eisenhower regularly takes positions for which Caro has no patience when Johnson takes them—foot-dragging on civil rights, favoring natural-gas price deregulation—without getting any authorial punishment beyond a mild slap on the wrist. Perhaps Caro prefers Eisenhower's modest demeanor. But when the rhythm of the story requires Caro to build up the Civil Rights Act of 1957 into a titanic achievement of Johnson's, he plays down that it was originally the Eisenhower administration's bill, which was watered down to the point of meaninglessness (beyond the merely symbolic) in Johnson's Senate. Similarly, when John F. Kennedy, representing a home state where there is none of the Confederate sentiment of Johnson's, rises on the Senate floor to announce, for Johnsonian reasons of presidential ambition, his support for the key gelding amendment, Caro, by now narratively committed to the idea that amendment or no amendment the bill was a milestone, observes that "Kennedy's speech rose to an eloquence that gave a hint of things to come."

THE RESULT OF this back-and-forthing, depending on who is playing politics and to what end, leads to an overall confusion about Caro's operative code of conduct. Politics, of course, is a blend of morality and practicality, of leadership and followership; but Caro does not convey a clear sense of what he considers the proper mix to be. Instead, as he switches Johnson jerkingly back and forth between goodness and badness, so also does he switch his attitude toward the craft that Johnson practiced in extreme form. Maybe, to Caro's mind, politics is noble when it is used to accomplish liberal goals and ignoble when it is not so used; but if that were the case, then tracking its procedures in such close detail would not be as absorbing as it obviously is for Caro, and as he makes it for readers of this book. Caro portentously repeats the mantra "*power*

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reveals" throughout the book. One might add that his own attitude toward power reveals intense fascination and not much critical distance.

The overall point of *Master of the Senate* is that Lyndon Johnson was not only the most effective Senate leader ever, but also that he single-handedly transformed the Senate from a moribund, failed body into a vital, essential one. Like many of Caro's assertions, this one seems overstated, especially if the proof is the Civil Rights Act of 1957. Johnson, in these pages, is completely convincing as a protean leader, but his Senate actually doesn't pass a lot of landmark legislation; and anyway one could say that by Richard Russell's lights, the previous Senate was a highly effective institution, if its goal was to prevent liberals from accomplishing anything. The drama and the substance will be more in sync when Caro describes the congressional session of 1965–1966, when Johnson as president rammed through a real Civil Rights Act, and the Voting Rights Act, and Medicare and Medicaid and the War on Poverty and federal aid to public schools. I can't wait.

Ambitious writers often hold up as their *beau ideal* the grand European social novels of the nineteenth century, with their majestic sweep, their panoply of memorable characters, their arresting set-pieces and digressions, and their quality of encompassing the entirety of a society. Caro seems to be writing toward this goal. Where he is simply in a different, and lesser, universe from Dickens and Tolstoy and their like, however, is in his attribution of godlike (or satanic) powers to individuals, especially his main character, as actors in history, and in his concomitant tendency to be morally simplistic. In great historical literature the times supersede the lives, without in any way diminishing them, and the consciousness of right and wrong does not transform all experience into parable. Caro is held back from the greatness for which he so palpably hungers by his evident lack of interest in rendering life not only as dramatic, but also as complicated and subtle. ■

The Best Offense

By RICHARD A. POSNER

Why Terrorism Works: Understanding the Threat, Responding to the Challenge by Alan M. Dershowitz

(Yale University Press, 271 pp., $24.95)

ALAN DERSHOWITZ'S notoriety makes it impossible to approach his new book with a completely open mind. His notoriety is not undeserved. Although he is a professor at Harvard Law School, Dershowitz is not a scholar. His principal activities, when he is not actually in class teaching, are defending infamous criminal defendants, such as O. J. Simpson, Claus von Bülow, Mike Tyson, and Jonathan Pollard; appearing on television talk shows; and writing books and articles of a journalistic character on current events, such as the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal and the 2000 presidential election deadlock. In his defense of his clients, and in his activities as a best-selling and camera-chasing "public intellectual," he is notable for a lack of self-restraint that should be surprising in an academic at a distinguished university, as when he said on Geraldo Rivera's show that a vote against impeaching Clinton would be not a vote for Clinton but instead "a vote against anti-environmentalism." In his last book before this one, he accused five justices of the Supreme Court of outright corruption in siding with Bush in *Bush* v. *Gore*, offering as prime evidence for this very serious charge such unverifiable hearsay as his unrecorded conversations with unnamed law clerks and other juicy leaks and hot tips. He has frequently blamed his losses in court on corruption on the part of prosecutors and judges.

The naughty Alan is occasionally on display in his latest book, as when he remarks that "former CIA lawyer Adam Saralsky has said he was fired from his job [in the wake of Pollard's arrest] because counterintelligence officers accused him of spying for Israel, with no evidence other than his identification as a religious Jew." Dershowitz himself offers no evidence for Saralsky's implausible charge. The book has other flaws, too. For a start, there is its misleading title: Dershowitz does not show that the two forms of terrorism that concern him, the Palestinian suicide bombers in Israel and the Al Qaeda network, actually "work" (that is, succeed) in any intelligible sense. The truth is that they may well be "suicidal" in the colloquial sense as well as the literal one.

MUCH OF DERSHOWITZ'S book is concerned not with the anatomy of modern terrorism but with what we should do to combat it. The book is episodic—more a collection of pieces on related topics than a unified, comprehensive approach to the problem of international terrorism. There are five chapters but only four essays, as the first chapter is really just a summary of what is to follow. The second chapter is a powerful, sickening narrative of Palestinian terrorism since 1968; I had forgotten how much of it there was after as well as before the Oslo accords of 1993 that were supposed to end it. What changed, and what differentiates Palestinian terrorism from the newer Islamicist terrorism—the violence of Osama bin Laden and his ilk—is that the Palestinians eventually decided to confine their deadly activities to Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip.

Dershowitz shows how cheap and practicable Palestinian terrorism turned out to be for the terrorists, owing to the appeasement of them that was practiced by all nations except Israel and the United States (though American policy has not been as firm and constant). Terrorists seized by other nations were invariably released or allowed to escape in short order, and so they paid no price and were in no serious way impeded. Leading the list of appeasers, Dershowitz mordantly notes, were "France, Germany, Italy, the U.N. General Assembly, the Nobel Prize Committee, and several churches." He remarks elsewhere on the special solicitude that Pope John Paul II has extended to Arafat, and notes that "at least three terrorist leaders have been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize."

Dershowitz shows how the policy of appeasement extended beyond releasing terrorists to embracing the terrorists' political objectives. Oslo, he argues, rewarded Palestinian terrorism, though in fairness he should have added that such

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a view is largely a matter of hindsight; at the time it was plausibly viewed by many as the reward for renouncing terrorism and as a sensible attempt by Israel to see if peace was possible. Other equally deserving or more deserving groups seeking independence, such as the Basques, the Kurds, and the Armenians, Dershowitz points out, receive negligible international support because they do not wield the terrorism weapon with sufficient ferocity to trigger the appeasement reflex. Since terrorism on the scale practiced by the Palestinians paid off, he argues, other groups with unsatisfied political aims, including bin Laden's followers and the ultra-radicals among the Palestinian Arabs, were encouraged to turn to large-scale terrorism.

THE LINKS THAT Dershowitz seeks to forge between Palestinian and Islamicist terrorism—the successes of the former becoming the inspiration for the latter, the two inseparable (the cover of *Why Terrorism Works* is dominated by photographs of Arafat and bin Laden)—are too indirect to be convincing. He quotes approvingly a statement by Benjamin Netanyahu that "the success of terrorists in one part of the terror network emboldens terrorists throughout the network," and he says that given how "the international community responded to terrorism between 1968 and 2000 by consistently rewarding and legitimizing it ... it is no wonder we had to suffer the horrors of September 11." Yet as even Dershowitz acknowledges, Palestinian terrorism is still primarily secular and has a limited—albeit radical and unattainable—aim, namely, to drive the Jews out of Israel, though for the violent radicals it seems that obtaining a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza is merely an interim aim. Arafat and bin Laden are hardly members of the same "network" if the term is used to denote actual relations rather than merely a nebulous affinity.

The latter form of terrorism, the bin Laden kind, Dershowitz himself calls "apocalyptic." Its aims, beyond seeking to wound the United States, are global but obscure. Maybe wounding us is its only serious aim; if so, the political "successes" of Palestinian terrorism would not have been an inspiration. It is worth recalling that Palestinians did not invent terrorism (they did not even invent suicide bombing), and it is hopelessly speculative to suppose, as Dershowitz implies though does not say outright, that Al Qaeda would not have become a terrorist organization had Arafat taken the Gandhian path of non-violent resistance to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. The roots of bin Laden's lethal anger are to be found, rather, in the distinctive social and religious conditions prevailing in Saudi Arabia. (In tension with his argument that terrorism "works," Dershowitz claims also that non-violence would have been a more effective strategy for the Palestinians than terrorism.)

Still, Dershowitz is correct that appeasement tends to feed terrorism rather than to starve it. The craven European response to Palestinian terrorism does rather remind one of Europe's craven and ineffectual response to the rise of Hitler. In both cases, appeasement was rationalized by reference to "root causes" (Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, in the case of the Palestinians, and the injustice of the Versailles Treaty, in the case of the Germans). But Dershowitz's conclusion—and one of the major themes of the book—is that nations therefore must adopt an unbending policy of refusing to make concessions to groups that resort to terrorism, and this seems hasty. He is right that concessions encourage terrorism and are therefore a costly policy that ought normally to be avoided. He is right that responding to terrorism by "try[ing] to understand or eliminate its alleged root causes" is just another form of appeasement. ("We don't address the root causes of a bad marriage that may have led a man to murder his wife—we hunt down the murderer and punish him.") But costs must be weighed against benefits. (Cost-benefit analysis is repeatedly, and usefully, invoked in *Why Terrorism Works*.) When terrorists have plausible aims and cannot be extirpated save at enormous cost, it may be sensible to make an accommodation with them. An endless war is not always the most moral or the most prudent course of action. Sometimes a political solution may be possible and desirable; Northern Ireland may be a current illustration. It all depends. But Dershowitz is correct to think that neither the Palestinian terrorists nor (certainly) Al Qaeda fits this bill.

In the rest of his book Dershowitz deals with ways of eliminating terrorism (other than by giving in to it). He considers the

Instead of an Epigraph

from John Shade

When your eyes open, then narrow in an instant,
Against the shine of greenery piercing through
A window-space, against July, against these birds singing,
It doesn't shame you then? It doesn't frighten you?

When, on the water of a lake, into its stillness,
The last slant ray falls from a thunderhead's black-blue
And pours itself across a wave that slowly chills it,
It doesn't frighten you, doesn't bring shame on you?

When, falling from pervading darkness, a snowflake bounces
In headlights that have chanced across the wall, then shoots
From sight, only to come again, melting, soundless
On a young woman's cheek—this doesn't frighten you?

It doesn't frighten you or shame you when the water
Runs down the asphalt, turning black with spring, each pool
Reflecting clouds, the sun in the fourth academic quarter
Entering to lick a schooldesk—this doesn't frighten you?

I can't tell what I'm driving at; I just don't get it ...
No reason in particular—babble—nothing new,
Always the one nonsense. What stillness and what beauty!
It really doesn't shame, doesn't frighten, you?

Timur Kibirov

—translated from the Russian by Paul Graves

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range of options open to what he calls an "amoral" society, but which is more accurately described as a society that operates without the limitations that democracy and civil liberties place on the use of force against its internal enemies—ordinary criminals and would-be revolutionaries. The qualification implicit in "internal" is important. In wartime, a liberal democracy treats its enemies with the same lack of consideration with which its enemies treat it. It follows either that war, even when defensive, is "amoral," or, more plausibly, that the morality of war is different from the morality of ordinary policing. But what Dershowitz really means is simply that a totalitarian regime would fight the particular kind of war that we are fighting more ruthlessly than we are fighting it, and therefore more effectively. For a liberal democracy may not be ideally qualified to fight this war. It is a war in which most of the fighting is against secret enemies within rather than against uniformed enemies without, and the most effective way of fighting secret enemies inside your own country involves the wholesale suspension of civil liberties.

DERSHOWITZ DEVOTES ONE of his chapters to a specific issue of the war against terrorism: namely, whether torture should be permitted to be used to extract information from suspected terrorists. He makes a point that only the most doctrinaire civil libertarians (not that there aren't plenty of them) deny: if the stakes are high enough, torture is permissible. No one who doubts that this is the case should be in a position of responsibility. If torture is the only means of obtaining the information necessary to prevent the detonation of a nuclear bomb in Times Square, torture should be used—and will be used—to obtain the information. Dershowitz gives the telling example of Philippine authorities who in 1995 "tortured a terrorist into disclosing information that may have foiled plots to assassinate the pope and to crash eleven commercial airliners carrying approximately four thousand passengers into the Pacific Ocean." He cites a federal court opinion that approved a police officer's choking a kidnapping suspect until the suspect revealed where the kidnap victim was. And he asks: "What moral principle could justify the death penalty for past individual murders and at the same time condemn nonlethal torture to prevent future mass murders?"

But it is typical of Dershowitz's lack of restraint that he should think it appropriate to reveal to his readers that his preferred form of "nonlethal torture" is inserting a sterilized needle under the suspect's fingernails. One might have expected that before recommending the infliction of physical pain Dershowitz would have explored the adequacy of truth serums, bright lights (the old "third degree"), and sleep deprivation—a combination, moreover, more aptly described as coercion than as torture. Maybe he has explored these alternatives and found them wanting, but there is no discussion of this question in the book. Instead he moves directly to a method that many will see (quite properly) as tinged with sadism. Moreover, it is unlikely that a single method of forcibly extracting information would be optimal in all cases. Some people may be less susceptible to physical pain than to other forms of inducement or coercion.

Dershowitz believes that the occasions for the use of torture should be regularized—by requiring a judicial warrant for the needle treatment, for example. But he overlooks an argument for leaving such things to executive discretion. If rules are promulgated permitting torture in defined circumstances, some officials are bound to want to explore the outer bounds of the rules. Having been regularized, the practice will become regular. Better to leave in place the formal and customary prohibitions, but with the understanding that they will not be enforced in extreme circumstances. Abraham Lincoln suspended habeas corpus during the early months of the Civil War. The Constitution almost certainly does not authorize the president to suspend habeas corpus. Lincoln did it anyway, and (as William Galston has argued recently) he was probably right to do so: the Union was in desperate straits and its survival was more important than complying with a provision of the Constitution. (Dershowitz criticizes the suspension in passing, but he does not consider the arguments for it.) But it does not follow from the practical wisdom of Lincoln's action that the Constitution should be amended actually to authorize the president to suspend habeas corpus. For a president might be inclined to test the scope of such authority. Similarly, it is not necessary to enact a statute authorizing torture—a statute that, as Dershowitz argues, might well be deemed constitutional, provided no effort was made to introduce confessions obtained by torture in judicial proceedings against the person tortured.

Dershowitz's discussion of torture, and the final essay in which he outlines other measures for fighting international terrorism, are animated by a recognition of the fact—again, a fact obvious to everyone except the doctrinaire civil libertarian—that the scope of our civil liberties is not graven in stone, but instead represents the point of balance between public safety and personal liberty. The balance is struck by the courts, interpreting the vague provisions of the Constitution that protect personal liberty; and it is constantly being re-struck as perceptions about safety and liberty change. The more endangered public safety is thought to be, the more the balance swings against civil liberties. That is how it is and that is how it should be; and it is good that so committed a defender of criminal rights as Dershowitz should state this in forthright and unapologetic terms. Terrorists are more dangerous than ordinary criminals, and so, as he points out, the dogma that it is better for ten guilty people to go free than for one innocent person to be convicted may not hold when the guilty ten are international terrorists seeking to obtain weapons of mass destruction. American history and legal practice show that the law can distinguish sensibly between different levels of threat to public safety. American history and legal practice also show that curtailments of civil liberties to meet national emergencies are temporary, ceasing when the emergency ceases. We do not know when the current threat will abate, but it is unduly pessimistic to suppose it never will.

ANOTHER SILLY DOGMA that Dershowitz rightly rejects is that collective punishment is never proper. He argues that people who cheer on or otherwise support terrorism, while not as culpable as the terrorists themselves, are sufficiently culpable to be appropriate targets of at least economic punishments. These are actually rather tepid examples of collective punishment; they sound more like accomplice liability. The classical notion of collective punishment punishes the innocent who are in a good position to control the guilty. Collective punishment so defined (as distinct from punishment visited upon an entire people or class for the deeds of some members that the other members could not reasonably be expected to prevent) is not alien to our system. An employer is liable for negligent injuries inflicted by his employees within the scope of their employment even if he was not negligent himself.

Dershowitz is scornful of the privacy fetish that prevented the FBI from checking the gun-purchase records of aliens detained in the wake of the September 11 attacks and that makes civil libertarians shudder at the very idea of a foolproof national identity card, even though, as he

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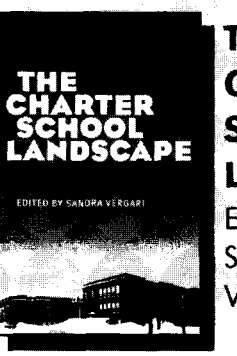
points out, it would reduce the need for ethnic profiling, that is, for the use of ethnicity as a proxy for likely criminality. He introduces the useful phrase (for which he credits Harvey Silverglate) the "feel of freedom" to guide the re-balancing that is required in the wake of the September 11 attacks and of all we have learned since about the terrorist threat. He argues that if our civil liberties are so far restricted that Americans no longer have the "feel of freedom"—no longer feel that they live in a basically free country—then we will have paid an enormous and probably an inordinate price for what are bound to be merely incremental and uncertain increases in our sense of safety. But as he points out, Israelis—or at least Israeli Jews, though he claims, rather unconvincingly, Israeli Arabs as well—still have the "feel of freedom" even though civil liberties are more limited in Israel than in the United States.

Dershowitz's book will anger unreconstructed civil libertarians, the government-phobes on the extreme right, and Arafat's European apologists. That is a considerable merit; but more important is that he has shown that international terrorism does not present an insoluble contradiction between the Constitution and American security. Police tactics and legal doctrines can be reasonably and defensibly adjusted to the threat without turning the country into either a police state or a libertarian playground for killers. ■



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Triste Trieste

By NICHOLAS HOWE

I.

WRITING ABOUT Trieste is rather like calculating degrees of separation between strangers. With ingenuity, one can connect almost any of the great figures of modernism to the Adriatic city. It was in Trieste that Italo Svevo and Umberto Saba lived and wrote their masterpieces; and Marinetti preached his doctrine of Futurism; and James Joyce taught English at the Berlitz School to Svevo and others, finished *Dubliners*, and wrote *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and parts of *Ulysses*; and Rilke found the inspiration for his *Duino Elegies* in a castle of that name outside the city; and Mahler served as orchestra conductor; and Freud carried out research on the sexual organs of male eels. Kafka worked for a time in the Prague office of a Triestine insurance company, and Proust's narrator tortured himself by imagining the youthful lesbian adventures of his beloved Albertine in Trieste. Trieste, in this story, was the greatest provincial capital of the twentieth century, a city that may not have equaled Paris or Berlin but certainly earned an extended chapter in the history of modernism.

The other story that gets told about Trieste presents it as a human entrepôt, the invented city of eighteenth-century Hapsburg expansionism in which Catho-

TRIESTE AND THE MEANING OF NOWHERE
by Jan Morris
(Simon and Schuster, 203 pp., $23)

THE PORT JEWS OF HABSBURG TRIESTE: ABSOLUTIST POLITICS AND ENLIGHTENMENT CULTURE
by Lois C. Dubin
(Stanford University Press, 335 pp., $55)

THE YEARS OF BLOOM: JAMES JOYCE IN TRIESTE 1904–1920
by John McCourt
(University of Wisconsin Press, 306 pp., $29.95)

MICROCOSMS
by Claudio Magris
translated by Iain Halliday
(Harvill, 277 pp., $13)

NICHOLAS HOWE teaches English at Ohio State University. His book *Across an Inland Sea: Writing in Place from Berlin to Buffalo* is forthcoming from Princeton University Press.

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lics, Orthodox Christians, Protestants, and Jews lived together with enviable harmony after Trieste's designation as a free port in 1719. In this vision of Trieste, religious tolerance and commercial prosperity came together because the Hapsburgs invited—and to a remarkable degree protected—the Jewish and Greek merchants who brought to the city their trading expertise and their commercial networks. This Trieste emerges as the product of Enlightenment virtue and its geographical site: the city's position as an accessible harbor for *Mitteleuropa*, as well as the political policies of Emperor Joseph II of the Hapsburgs, combined to turn a sleepy settlement into one of the great ports of the world by the middle of the nineteenth century. Goods shipped to Europe from every continent were marked *Via Trieste*. The city came to be known as the "third entrance to the Suez Canal" because so much traffic flowed from there to and from Asia.

Then, in July 1914, the Austro-Hungarian battleship *Viribus Unitis* brought the corpses of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie to Trieste after the couple was assassinated in Sarajevo. Their funeral cortège through the city marked the end of its great years, for with the conclusion of World War I and the breakup of empire, Trieste lost its reason for being as the port of *Mitteleuropa*. Except, that is, for a few years in the late 1930s when it came to be known by another name, the "Port of Zion," as Jews embarked from Trieste for Palestine or anywhere else they might find refuge from the horrors of Nazism. In 1943, after the Mussolini regime collapsed and the Germans seized power, a rice-processing plant in Trieste became the site of the only Nazi extermination camp in Italy.

When Churchill delivered his fateful speech about the Iron Curtain falling across Europe, he designated Trieste as its southern terminus. The city had no strategic value for the Western powers after World War II, but it became a site of contention because it could not be allowed to fall to the Soviet bloc and become its port on the Mediterranean. As one empire replaced another, Trieste remained a token in the world of geopolitics. Still, the city retained its Italianate name, and was never Slavicized as Trst in the postwar years. With its formal return to Italy in 1954, the dream of the nineteenth-century Irredentists was complete: Trieste was a part of the mother country. It was redeemed.

But redeemed to what sort of life? If you check any of the standard English-language guidebooks for Italy, you will find at most a few pages about Trieste, and they politely hint that it probably does not deserve much of your vacation time. Its port, once the second busiest in all the Mediterranean (after Marseilles), has become the fifth or the twelfth busiest in Italy, depending on which source you consult and what year it specifies. Trieste remains a place of pompously ornate nineteenth-century buildings, of insurance companies, of streets haunted by writers long dead and the tourists who pursue them, of warehouses filled with coffee imported from Brazil.

In their decline, the city's two great stories collapse together in the inevitable pun: Triste Trieste. Joyce gave the pun a more allusive form in *Finnegans Wake*—"And trieste, ah trieste ate I my liver!"—playing on an Italian expression for ill temper and the French phrase *triste était mon livre*. I suspect that nobody writing about Trieste in Joyce's wake has managed to evade the pun or to resist the urge to shape a single narrative of the place. Triste Trieste runs as an explicit theme through the books by Claudio Magris, Jan Morris, and John McCourt, sometimes to the point of seeming in each of them more a cliché than a fresh observation. Even Lois C. Dubin's erudite book, which ends its portrait of Triestine Jews long before the decline of the city after World War I, cannot escape the aura of Triste Trieste, for no reader can avoid reading the conclusion that she has refrained from writing: the death of Trieste as a thriving center of Jewish life.

Each of these four books tells a different version of that sad place Trieste. Dubin offers a history of the relations between the Jewish community and its Hapsburg rulers that seems now to capture a golden moment of tolerance. McCourt writes a highly literary account that weaves the events of sixteen years into the texture of Joyce's fiction, often at the level of translating his puns or phrases to locate their Triestine reference. Magris, a deeply imaginative writer, ranges through the city of his life and its surrounding regions with a Proustian reverence for the truth of memory. And Morris turns to Trieste to make sense of her long nomadic life as a travel writer. Each of these books, even those that are scrupulously impersonal in their scholarship, can be read as a kind of autobiography. Trieste certainly gets under the skin of those who write about it.

II.

In 1985 JAN MORRIS published her only novel, the enigmatically titled *Last Letters From Hav*, in which she portrayed the days before a military coup that will change everything in Hav, a Levantine city-state perched on a promontory of the Mediterranean. Each people that has passed through the eastern end of this sea has left its traces: Greeks, Italians, Arabs, French, Germans, Russians, Moslems, Slavs, Chinese, to name only those whose quarters or places of worship appear on the map that prefaces the book. Hav is a city that has never quite existed in any time or place, but it distills a lifetime of travel into a single place that can be the heart's field or the novelist's utopia: desired but etymologically unattainable. Morris's technique in *Last Letters* wonderfully reverses Italo Calvino's method in *Invisible Cities*. Calvino has his narrator, Marco Polo, describe a theoretically infinite series of cities in which each is known by its single defining feature; but Morris makes a collage out of all her favorite Mediterranean places and calls it Hav.

Certain features of Hav seem meant to evoke Trieste, especially its artful jumbling of the Italian and the Slavic in a coastal city set beneath a massive stone escarpment. In her new book, Morris admits that after finishing *Last Letters* she found that "between every line Trieste was lurking." As she wrote in the novel: "I count myself lucky in having seen [Hav] for the first time late in a traveling life, for it was itself a little compendium of the world's experience, historically, aesthetically, even perhaps spiritually." *Trieste and the Meaning of Nowhere* is very much a book written late in a traveling life, and it uses Trieste to ask what the meaning of that traveling life might have been.

Readers familiar with Morris's travel writing, especially the sleek and stylish essays that she did in the 1970s for *Rolling Stone*, may be surprised and even disappointed by her new book. It is at once the most personal of her travel books and also the most readerly. Only a few of its chapters are given over to Morris's trademark technique, the precise description of a physical place that somehow yields, as if by sleight of hand, an evocation of its spirit or ethos. She knows the literature that was produced in Trieste by Svevo, Joyce, and company, and she has drawn heavily and skillfully on previous studies of the city by historians and travelers. The personal quality of her book is framed through her memories of the city from 1946, when she—then James Morris and in British army uniform—sat "on a bollard on the Molo Audace, close to the Piazza Unità, to write a maudlin essay." As she says, her younger male self was writing "a piece about nostalgia, but nostalgia for a place and condition I had

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never known: Europe before the convulsions of the twentieth century had upset all its assumptions."

She seems never to have written that maudlin essay, unless one counts such moments as this from *Trieste and the Meaning of Nowhere*: "The books I have written are no more than smudged graffiti on a wall, and I shall write no more of them. Money? Enough to live on. Critics? To hell with 'em. Kindness is what matters, all along, at any age—kindness, the ruling principle of nowhere!" Such expressions of sentiment are heartfelt, touching, and thankfully quite rare in this book. The transformation of Jan Morris into a sweet granny is not something that I can eagerly accept. I have learned too much from her about how to look at places and write about them to settle for avowals of kindness. I can get that from any Sunday sermon.

Is one being selfish in asking of Morris that she keep such feelings to herself and write travel books that charm and also redeem that increasingly tawdry genre? For it is a daring move to end a career that has covered all the flash-and-glitz places of the planet by writing a portrait of a city that no blasé traveler intent on impressing friends would seek out. Her book quietly raises a steep challenge: if writing about travel is to be more than pornography for the stay-at-home, then she will prove its value by taking on nowhere. Forget the exotic, the ruggedly inaccessible, the unspoiled. Turn instead to the place that has been so written about that it can seem impossible to know it as anything but a jumble of texts.

If that place also has a saving element of melancholy to it, then so much the better. "Melancholy is Trieste's chief rapture," Morris observes. "In almost everything I read about this city, by writers down the centuries, melancholy is evoked. It is not a stabbing sort of disconsolation, the sort that makes you pine for death (although Trieste's suicide rate, as a matter of fact, is notoriously high)." No, the melancholy of Trieste, Morris concludes, is that of exile, or the "sensuality of homesickness." Trieste is for her, in a phrase that evokes the years after World War II, "an existentialist sort of place, and its purpose is to be itself." The vanity of the melancholic is to treat everything as an extension of the self's own exquisite sensibility, to wash everything in a faded mauve light. The strength of Morris's book about Trieste is that it never confuses the melancholic with the horrifying. As she says in one exact sentence of the Risiera di San Sabba, where Nazis exterminated Jews: "It is one place in Trieste that speaks of the tragic rather than the poignant." Much honor is owed to a writer who scrupulously maintains that distinction.

There are chapters in this book that count among the best travel writing that Morris has ever done. Curiously, though, they are largely devoted to describing the environs of Trieste rather than the center of the city. Perhaps there, writing about the Karst (the limestone escarpment that rises above the city), Morris is unburdened by the ghosts of Svevo and Rilke and Joyce and can freely write descriptive prose about the terrain and its people that will get the reader wanting to move, to go there. The Karst, she writes, is "a place of stones—drystone walls, villages of stone, churches of stone, stone houses, boulders and quarries everywhere—but with patches of extreme fertility. There vineyards flourish, and sometimes you may see leafed branches attached to gates. This tells you the house inside is an *osmizza*, where wine and food are available." That has always been Morris's great gift as a writer: to give us enough of a place to make us want to be there, though we half suspect as we read her that it will never be as engaging in reality as it is in her prose. That it will be all stone without a vineyard or *osmizza* in sight.

III.

In Lois C. Dubin's meticulous if somewhat institutional account of the relations between the Jewish community of Trieste and the governing Hapsburg authorities, two vivid moments especially stand out. The first concerns the late eighteenth-century "insurance magnate" Joseph Eliezer Morpurgo, who, in addition to composing his own poetry, translated Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man* into Hebrew. This detail suggests much about the status of Triestine Jews, or at least some of their elite, as figures of the Enlightenment: fluent in not only the languages that were necessary for conducting international business, but also in those necessary for reading all that was new and noteworthy in secular literature. We learn relatively little else about Morpurgo from Dubin except that he was active in recruiting a progressive rabbi to serve the community; but from his translation of Pope one imagines a life of cultivated prosperity in which religious duties, secular pleasures, and commercial successes were all possible for the same man. And, as Dubin suggests, it would be hard to locate that possibility for Jews anywhere else in Europe during those decades.

The other moment in Dubin's account

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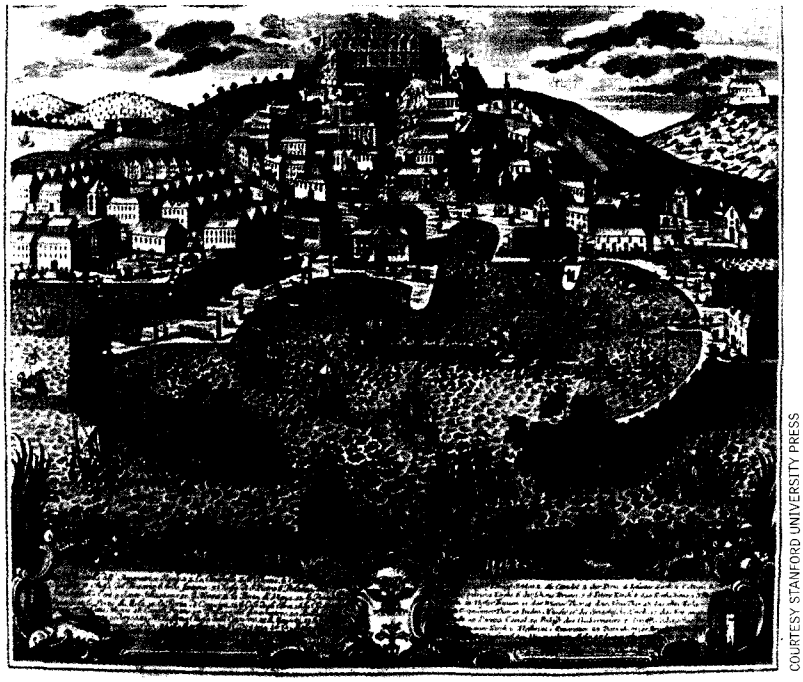
that speaks vividly to the circumstances of Triestine Jewry comes from a letter written in about 1807 by a French emigré nobleman to his brother, a merchant resident in Trieste. He opens with bold assurance—"The past is dead"—and continues: "The city you have chosen for your new undertakings is the most suitable and certain for your success; it is the Philadelphia of Europe, the city typical of pioneers of our old continent, the port where the shipwrecked find welcome and a promising new life." Trieste as the refuge for emigrants within Europe, as a free port for more than trade goods, as a city of brotherly love, as a kind of American outpost in the old world: all this speaks to the hold that the city had on the European imagination. But it also reminds us that Trieste was effectively the contemporary of Philadelphia; it came to consequence in the second half of the eighteenth century, as its population increased from 6,433 in 1758 to somewhere between 20,000 and 24,000 around 1800. Trieste was a rarity on the European continent: a new city that held out the possibility of a new life for those who ventured there.

This city and the life that it offered to its Jewish population were entirely the result of Hapsburg self-interest as propagated by Maria Theresa and then, more radically, by her son Joseph II. If he was far more enlightened about matters of religious and ethnic difference in Trieste than his mother (no great friend to the Jews elsewhere in the Hapsburg realms), he never lost sight of the political and economic necessity of making the city into a thriving port. Still, he was also responsible in 1781 for a Patent of Toleration for Lutherans, Calvinists, and Greek Orthodox. As Dubin explains: "This, the first legislation of toleration by a Catholic monarch, opened with the rationale that 'all violence to conscience is harmful' and the conviction 'of the great benefit accruing to religion and to the State from a true Christian tolerance.'" Later in that same year Joseph extended his policy of toleration for non-Catholics to the Jews of Trieste in order, as he wrote, "to make the numerous members of the Jewish nation . . . more useful to the state."

Under a regime capable of nicely balancing concern for its own Catholic conscience with a lively awareness of the economic utility of religious others, all sorts of opportunities became available to non-Catholics. By definition, Dubin concentrates on the port Jews of Trieste, but their prosperity and relative liberty were not exceptional to them as a group in that city. The presence of non-Catholic Christians—various Protestant denominations, but especially Greek Orthodox—opened social space in Trieste, and the Jews flourished in it. More exactly, cultured Italian Jews of Sephardic lineage flourished there because they were more worldly and less isolated than their Ashkenazic brethren.



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Albrecht Carlo Seutter, *Prospect of the Port and City of Trieste, before 1750*

Or so Hartwig Wessely (Naftali Herz Weisel) was willing to argue in several polemical pamphlets written in the 1780s to improve the standing of Triestine Jews.

The fact seems to have been that the tolerance extended to Jews by the Hapsburg authorities had much to do with the presence of other non-Catholics in Trieste. The religious distinction that Joseph II articulated is best set not in the traditional terms of Christian and non-Christian, but in more specific terms of Catholic and non-Catholic. Would Jews have prospered in Trieste as they did without the presence of such other commercially valuable groups as Greeks? Dubin does not directly address this question. All of her evidence suggests that Jews would not have fared as well had they been the sole religious minority in the city.

That the Jews of Trieste were aware of their exceptional and thus precarious status within the empire made them intensely concerned to avoid disreputable business practices, especially involving bankruptcy and "wicked usury." Edicts from officials in Vienna and Trieste were unambiguous on this score: the Jews were to police themselves and not tolerate any of the sharp practices that had earned them their unsavory reputation elsewhere. Yet as Dubin shows in the most interesting chapter of her book, the major ground of dispute between Triestine Jews and imperial officials concerned not business practices but Hapsburg marriage reforms.

These new policies regarding the civil status of marriage were seen by the established Jewish community as a challenge to its autonomy, that is, to its right to regulate this most important of all practices so as to ensure its survival as a religiously defined community. Here Dubin departs from her usual method of treating the Jews of Trieste as a relatively homogenous group of nameless and faceless people, and instead focuses on specific individuals. With the stories of Jacob Pardo and Corona Luzzatto or Benedetto (Ben Zion Rafael ha-Kohen) Frizzi and Relle (Rachel or Bella) Morschene, we get a sense of the complicated and sometimes messy private lives of Trieste's Jews. Issues involving marriage, divorce, and the status of repudiated women bring these figures into sharp relief and provide some human interest in Dubin's otherwise uniformly public history of imperial decrees and community responses.

Other than these two couples caught up in romantic and legal entanglements, very few individuals emerge from *The Port Jews of Trieste*. This book is a study of a religious and political environment, of a moment in a city's history when an often persecuted religious minority enjoyed a certain security and toleration. It is meticulous, well-documented, and deeply informative about the imperial practices and policies of the Hapsburgs. As a study of how Jews actually lived day in and day out in Trieste during those lucky years, it is less satisfying. Dubin treats Trieste as something of a geographical abstraction. She has little feel for the place and its

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unique—even historically determinative—topography; she rarely walks us through the streets of the city and its ghetto or other Jewish neighborhoods. Her Trieste is not so much a place on the map of Europe as it is an exemplary location in a very long Jewish history. The paradox, of course, is that Jews in Trieste enjoyed their exceptional status precisely because Trieste was not just any city in the Hapsburg realm.

IV.

If Dubin's sense of Trieste largely begins and ends with the history of its Jewish population, John McCourt's does so with Trieste's influence on the oeuvre of James Joyce. There is something necessary about both books, an intense and undeviating focus on one aspect of this notoriously prodigal and unclassifiable place. To do such books justice, one must submit to that focus and accept the narrowing of a place to one moment in its history. Yet by doing so one risks losing sight of why Trieste was so alluring as a new Philadelphia in the middle of Europe or as a necessary stop on a writer's odyssey from Dublin to parts beyond.

McCourt states unambiguously that his purpose is to rebut a claim that Stanislaus Joyce made about his brother: "The cosmopolitan atmosphere of the Trieste of the early twentieth century did not inspire him at all.... No, Trieste did not give Jim anything." After reading *The Years of Bloom: James Joyce in Trieste 1904–1920*, the mystery is not whether James Joyce took much from Trieste but rather why Stanislaus Joyce should have insisted that he did not. The irony is that Stanislaus lived there longer than James and thus surely knew how much his brother took from Trieste. Perhaps his remark is to be explained on more personal grounds: he denied that Trieste gave James anything because James took so much from Stanislaus during his years there. If there is a hero in McCourt's book, it is Stanislaus Joyce: the one person who could be counted on to pay the rent; to buy food for James, Nora, and their two children; to hold things together so that James could write and drink and whore and drink and whore some more.

However much of an unworldly innocent James Joyce may have been when he arrived in Trieste in 1904, he certainly left in 1920 as a habitué of bars and brothels. He also left Trieste as the friend of Italo Svevo and other of the city's writers, and as the author of *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The Dublin that he fled with Nora Barnacle certainly had its share of bars and brothels, but the ones in Trieste were different. They were on the Adriatic Sea, not the Irish Sea. Trieste was a harbor where Joyce could imagine himself as being, like Odysseus, on a voyage through the universe of the Mediterranean. The final destination of that journey would be *Ulysses*, completed in 1922 and filled with endless topical references, in-jokes, and literary allusions to the city. Joyce may have finished the novel in Paris, but, as McCourt shows with the precision of a fine engraver, he could not have written it without Trieste.

McCourt is the perfect guide for this particular story of Trieste. He sometimes treats the city more as a literary setting—and essentially one for Joyce to the neglect of Svevo and company—than as a walkable, mappable place. But he does have the great virtue of knowing the literary topography of Joyce's fiction far better than the average travel writer who makes the obligatory passing reference to one of Joyce's novels. Born and educated in Dublin, McCourt has lived and taught in Trieste since 1991, where he directs an annual Trieste Joyce School. He is the inside scholar, the devotee of Joyce. His book is almost infinite in its patience with details and its ability to translate those details into the threads of Joyce's fiction. It is blessedly free of academic jargon and knows enough to make its own jokes by quoting Joyce's jokes without any unnecessary commentary.

The Trieste to which Joyce came was still the great Hapsburg entrepôt in which Jewish and Greek merchants flourished and, to Joyce's pleasure, helped to keep in check the power of the Catholic Church. The city also had known, as McCourt shows, a long list of famous visitors and residents, all of whom figured in Joyce's imagination of the place: Napoleon, Casanova, Nelson, Stendhal, Verdi, Burton. Joyce enjoyed the comings and goings of the city, the Babel of languages spoken on its streets, the variety of people he saw daily. McCourt calls it an "Oriental workshop" for Joyce and notes that, in addition to the traders from Asia that could be found in Trieste, its most elegant brothel was called the Villa Orientale, though Joyce seems to have taken his custom elsewhere. Joyce eked out a living by teaching English both privately and at the Berlitz School, where he was not at all reluctant to trade on whatever reputation he had as a writer to cultivate acquaintances among his bourgeois and aristocratic students.

The Trieste that Joyce left in 1920, after passing most of the war years in Zurich, was a much-reduced place after the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. One senses from McCourt's biography that Trieste had by then outlived its usefulness for Joyce, and that only the gentlest prompting from Ezra Pound was needed to lure him to Paris. So Trieste was a kind of way station for Joyce, the European metropolis that he required to flee provincial Dublin when he was not yet ready for Paris. Or so it seems from McCourt's account.

There were significant parallels between Dublin and Trieste, as Joyce knew; and he did not hesitate to announce them in his journalism of those years. Both were occupied states of an imperial power, both were possessed of a great mythic history, both were filled with writers and intellectuals too intelligent to be entirely comfortable with their provincial location and status. McCourt puts the matter well: "Like the Irish nationalists, the Triestine irredentists turned a blind eye to the complexities of the past in order to present a mythical vision of it which they hoped to re-create in the future." In that regard, one might wonder if Joyce's decision to leave Trieste after World War I was due exclusively to changes in Middle European politics. Or did the events of 1916 and the declaration of an Irish Republic independent of Great Britain also play a part? Had the connection between Trieste and Dublin lost its purpose when both were cut loose from their imperial capitals?

While he was in Trieste, though, Joyce certainly enjoyed its pleasures. The lists of actors, musicians, composers, and singers who appeared in Trieste in those years would do credit to any great city. Joyce was clearly not cut off from the culture he so loved and so metamorphosed to serve his own fiction. Indeed, just as he wrote best

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about Dublin while in Trieste, so he used Trieste best in his fiction while he lived in Paris. During his time in the city, he "was carefully combing the Irish historical and cultural landscape as well as that of Trieste" in ways that would shape the cityscape of Dublin for *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. McCourt works out the overlapping maps for Joyce's lived Trieste and Joyce's written Dublin with great precision and (to the non-specialist) somewhat intimidating specificity. Still, his book proves that Stanislaus Joyce was quite wrong to claim that his brother got nothing from Trieste.

McCourt makes that point at a certain cost: all of Trieste and all of the people there exist in his vision chiefly as they enabled Joyce to write his fiction. Thus, one finds McCourt's pages on Svevo disappointing because they speak only of his usefulness to Joyce and not of his own achievement as a writer. Put another way, this book is faithful to its title: it is not a literary or cultural history of Trieste but an archaeology of the sources that Joyce used for the creation of Leopold Bloom. McCourt ends inevitably by evoking Triste Trieste: "And yet, even if Trieste's moment of glory had passed, its immortality was safe in the hands of Joyce, for it was there that he had found 'the rock of Ithaca, and on the sea, the sail of Ulysses.'" This ending is so lovely precisely because its misplaced claim would have most amused Svevo and his supremely ironical Zeno.

V.

CLAUDIO MAGRIS WRITES a very personal Trieste. Born there in 1939, he has been a member of the Italian parliament and a professor of German studies at the universities of Turin and Trieste. His book *Danube*, which appeared in 1986, was a wonderfully learned and jumbled account of a trip down that river. Magris, in sum, is the embodiment in writerly form of Trieste and its Italian and Istrian environs in the twentieth century. Or, at least, of the Trieste described by a character in John Berger's novel *G.*: "this city without a soul, this city with a German mind and an Italian stomach." Perhaps more fairly, one might say that Magris's *Microcosms* was conceived to refute the claim that Trieste lacks a soul, while also giving it an Italian mind and a German stomach.

These national stereotypes are pale abstractions, even if the metaphors that they propose are corporeal; but they are the stock-in-trade of writers passing through Trieste. Magris works differently. He is a native of the place and also a genuinely cosmopolitan man. The necessary corrective that he offers to the usual portrait of Trieste is to embed the city in its surrounding regions of Istria, the Tyrol, and the Piedmont. His title tells all: his vision is not of some overarching imperial entity but rather of enclaves, small populations, microcosms that maintain diversity and resist the homogenizing forces of political oppression. Magris has a fondness for the character sketch, for the evocation of a place and moment told through the story of an individual's life. It is a method that can remind the reader at times of Ignazio Silone and Carlo Levi, as well as of the contemporary historian Carlo Ginzburg and his accomplishments in "micro-history." For all these writers, a place is to be known through its stories and its people, especially if they are idiosyncratic and generously garrulous with their memories.

Microcosms as a whole is organized into nine sections, beginning in the Caffé San Marco in Trieste and ending with evocations of the writer's memories of the city's Public Garden. In between Magris guides the reader through the topographical and cultural zones that surround the city and make it worth celebrating: rural Valcellina with its corn-harvest festival; the mysteriously liminal Lagoons, which flow between earth and water; the Slavic communities in the forest of Nevoso; the foothills of Collina and the stories of the innkeeper Piero; the island world of Apsyrtides, where each place has had over the centuries Latin, Illyrian, Slav, and Italian names; the high mountain region of the Antholz, with its *Stube*, its skiing, and its Meissen porcelain shop. The structure of Magris's book suggests that a place must summon up, if not its opposite, then certainly its variant: from city to country, from land to water, from mountain to island, from country to city garden. And yet it is all so much more subtle than such antinomies can suggest, for the move from one to the other is never final or absolute. The Lagoon, always both water and earth, is the characteristic site for Magris.

Magris revels in his ability to speak the regions' languages, to know their stories, to eat their foods. He writes with simple, beautiful pleasure of the local wine or the corn enjoyed at a harvest festival: one wants to share the table with him. And more, one wants to acknowledge the value of local knowledge, of long familiarity when writing about place. Jan Morris is quoted on the back cover of *Microcosms* as saying that it is "the very antithesis of your run-of-the-mill travel book." That is true, but to call Magris's intensely evocative volume a travel book is to impose on it the reader's perspective without quite registering the writer's perspective. *Microcosms* is about staying in the same home region and hearing the same stories year in and year out, of slowly acquiring over the years from the same store a table service for sixteen so that each child will inherit enough to feed eight.

Magris does not sink into sentimentality; but in his celebration of places and their enduring customs he sometimes risks evading the changes that have run through Italy over the last generation. In a rare moment of anger, he castigates "the gelatinous 'postmodern,' in which everything is interchangeable with its opposite and the Black Mass and its junk is placed on the same level as Saint Augustine's thought." So too he several times indulges in easy jokes about semiotics and its practitioners. No doubt he wants us to have Umberto Eco in mind. There is some justice in Magris's charge that postmodernism levels everything, so that distinctions of type and quality are eliminated: his evocation of microcosms is a defense of the human need to move among different and incommensurable places, languages, and cultures. But one wants to add that the real danger of postmodernism to communities of the sort traversed in *Microcosms* is not so much that it will level them into sameness but that it will degrade them into kitsch decoration, rather like the tacky stylistic flourishes of certain celebrated architects.

MAGRIS IS INTENSELY devoted to memory. Distancing himself by writing of himself in an anonymous third-person voice—a Triestine move if ever there was one—he tells in the book's opening section: "Little by little he retraced his path backwards, back to that little girl in the white socks in the cycling area in the Public Garden, the one who'd ordered him sulkily to sort her wheel out for her and then had shot off without so much as a glance." Many pages later, in the section titled "Public Garden," that girl returns, as does Magris himself, though both are changed. This time he is a young boy walking across the garden to the pond where he will set free a store-bought goldfish that has become listless and seems about to die. Not knowing what else to do with it, the boy hopes that returning it to its native element, or as close to that as he can find in the center of Trieste, will make it well. Along the way he sees the girl, who has acquired, through the power of adult memory, a name and a sexualized being: "Elena rides a bike; she has fine, strong, slender legs above her white bobby socks. Her nose is bold, her mouth, wearing a pout more often than

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not, is a rosebud—a rose with thorns; when you pluck up the courage to ask her to take a ride together on the bikes she will perhaps say yes, but then she turns her head, contemptuously, and sets off alone without another word, her small unripe breasts already hard beneath her blouse." The reminiscence of Proust's Marcel playing in the Champs-Élysées with Gilberte is unmistakable. One wonders if Elena ever really existed, or was instead created in Magris's memory out of his reading. The distinction between life and books in Magris cannot ever be sorted out neatly.

Magris tells us as much when, in the same section of *Microcosms*, he describes the busts of writers to be found in the Public Garden. Time shifts in this passage; the voice telling us about the statues is that of Professor Magris, who knows and loves their writing and yet also does not lose sight of the small boy intent on his errand of mercy. In addition to local worthies known only in Trieste, we are reintroduced to James Joyce, Scipio Slataper, Umberto Saba, and Italo Svevo. Or, more exactly, there is no bust of Svevo, only a marble base with his name and dates and a metal pin to hold his missing head. Magris, the local historian, tells us that this is the third time Svevo's head has been stolen, always for reasons unknown. But he adds that Svevo deserves to be honored in this way, as a writer whose work orbits "around voids, around vertiginous absences concealed with a sphinx-like smile." Whoever made off with his head was less a vandal than a literary critic.

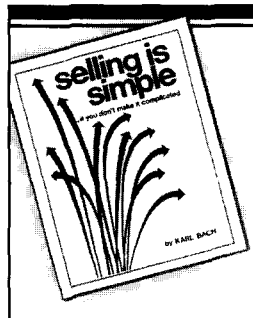
"Public Garden" is certainly the most moving section in *Microcosms*, as well as the most daring. Elsewhere in the book Magris works by recounting stories told by others, by describing landscapes with a sure eye for topography, by sometimes indulging in a prose that goes beyond the purple. But in "Public Garden" he relies on a precise, measured evocation of all that shaped his life, both the never-to-be-attained Elena and the enduring presence of his great writers, and makes us feel the abiding presence of place in his life. After this understated section, which ends as he "returns home without his fish, and with nothing else in his hands," the final pages of *Microcosms* feel forced into reverie, into a transcendence that is not quite warranted by the story of the place.

Even if it makes one want to travel to Trieste and its environs, *Microcosms* is not a travel book. Instead, it testifies to the saving vision that can come only from an insider learned in the ways and the histories of a place and yet free of all provinciality. To love the incongruities of one's native place, to have read everything that has been written about one's city, to write of home with a cosmopolite's style: these are the qualities that make *Microcosms* one of the most remarkable portraits of place written in our time.

THERE ARE QUALITIES of Trieste that remain still unredeemed, long after the dreams of the Irredentists were satisfied. For the city never gives itself completely to those who write about it. Not to these four, who each know it in an exemplary way; nor to other writers, such as Joseph Cary, whose *A Ghost in Trieste* (1993) may well be the most beautifully haunted book about Trieste ever produced by an outsider. The city's story never remains fixed within its historical contours, as does that of a national capital such as Paris or London. Perhaps it bears some analogies with Berlin, another invented city of a past imperial power, another city that writers of the last decade have portrayed as ridden with ghosts.

Trieste stays in the imagination less because it was once a flourishing port or the home of modernist writers than because it remains a place of unresolved geography. It stands as a place that reminds us that the circumstances of geography are not as easily ignored as the prophets of a globalized world of telecommunications and cyberspace would have us believe. For that territory at the northern end of the Adriatic, a sea set within another inland sea, is about where the juxtaposition of bordering peoples and languages becomes history. Trieste bountifully bears out Fernand Braudel's injunction that the historian—and by implication the writer of places—must "be on the lookout for divergences, contrasts, breaks, frontiers."

The stories of Trieste teach that these divergences and frontiers have shifted their nominal, even ideological forms from generation to generation. In 1979, Jan Morris opened a dispatch from Trieste by describing it for her American readers as being situated "where capitalist Italy meets Communist Yugoslavia." Twenty-three years later, these coordinates sound as dated as the old references to Trieste as a place where imperial Austro-Hungary met monarchist Italy or where port Jews met Greek traders who met Hapsburg bureaucrats. The names change but the place remains somehow the same: where the unexpected and the unforeseen collide and fructify in a city that the world is usually too distracted to notice. That the world does so only when it is too late may be the true and enduring sadness of Trieste. ■



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WASHINGTON DIARIST

A Year Later

A SOCIETY THAT IS NOTORIOUS for its inability to remember is about to do nothing else. America eats the past, which is why people eaten by the past run to it; but even the American creed of newness will pause on September 11, and learn its limitations. The *yahrzeit* is here, and the least lachrymose country on earth is devising its rituals of commemoration. The interesting question is whether the memory will have life outside the media. September 11 will be a test of the American sense of reality, for it marks the anniversary of a day on which reality bested every representation of it. Most of us will be remembering an event that we never saw, which is precisely the character of collective memory: knowledge made so immediate that it feels like experience. This may be an illusion, but it is a vital illusion. It is a fiction created against oblivion. Most of us saw the towers fall only on the screen; but what we saw was so shocking that that even as it riveted our gaze to the screen it shook our gaze loose from it, so that we looked not at the screen but through the screen. We were not, strictly speaking, witnesses of what happened; and yet we gained a kind of knowledge by acquaintance. It was a measure of the horror that the media were too weak to interfere with our consciousness of it. In American existence, this counts as an epiphany. For the managers of meaning, the anchors and the reporters and the commentators, were themselves too shocked to set to work.

BUT LATER THEY SET TO WORK, AND "September 11" was born. "September 11" was the deadening of September 11. It was deadened, like all images and ideas that are hallowed, by repetition, and also by sentiment, which is what our popular culture uses to drive away lasting significance. The American heart is the bouncer at the door of the American mind. And so the memory entrepreneurs—I take this term from a profoundly stimulating study of "the ethics of memory" by Avishai Margalit that Harvard University Press will publish in the fall—transformed the recollection of the event into what Tom Brokaw, speaking recently in Pasadena about his network's big plans for the anniversary, referred to unpejoratively as an "emotional bath." The media is greedy for tears. I expect also that what will be commemorated on television will be the coverage of the catastrophe as much as the catastrophe itself. Many reporters have an unattractive tendency to believe that an event that they have covered is an event that has happened to them. This is understandable, I suppose: when you are close it is hard to concede that you are far. But this is no time for insiders. The bathos of Aaron Brown and Diane Sawyer and Peter Jennings and Barbara Walters, the moistening eyes and the bitten lips and the plangent sighs, the slumming with the ordinary folk, will be very hard to take. It will be important to recall that these are not representative figures and not figures of spiritual authority. They are tourists in history, and like all tourists they are emotional athletes. Their solemnity is always just around the corner from their self-congratulation. They are paid never to recede before what they do not understand; to have words even when they do not have thoughts; to leave good feelings even, or especially, in the wake of bad tidings. They fear nothing so much as stillness. And so the objective of this commemoration, if it is to honor the dead and to quicken the sorrow, must be to resist the notion that a television audience is a family or a community or a nation, and (if you will pardon the expression) to re-privatize the wound. There is nothing that anybody can say or show on television that will be as crushing as what one may oneself imagine about what it must have been like to perish at the World Trade Center a year ago. Imagination is television's mortal enemy; and mourning is, to a large extent, an activity of the imagination, which presents the absent and resurrects the dead.

"THE TRUTH IS THAT PEOPLE RELished this experience. It's obvious that they would never have wished this calamity on themselves or others, but inside the perimeter lines and beyond the public's view it served for many of them as an unexpected liberation—a national tragedy of course, but one that was contained, unambiguous, and surprisingly energizing." I find these words in William Langewiesche's account of the clean-up—or what he too cleverly calls "the unbuilding"—of the World Trade Center in *The Atlantic*. There I find also reports of "the vital new culture that grew up at the Trade Center site," and "the magnificent smoking terrain of the Trade Center site—this ever-changing American geography" and "the creative turbulence that followed the attacks." The tone is wrong. Langewiesche describes the courageous engineers who entered the infernal ruins as "tak[ing] in the sights": "The truth is, we all liked it there.... It was ... an intriguing place to be, and less macabre than outsiders supposed." The articles are unforgettable; but finally they diminish the story into a tale of adventure, a memoir of real men and real disaster, a perfect storm. Langewiesche could have written about the aftermath of the Johnstown flood or the Lisbon earthquake in precisely this manner. His affecting narrative has the unfortunate effect of dehistoricizing its subject. The World Trade Center was not unbuilt, it was attacked. This was not the work of the gods, or the consequence of a series of physical and chemical reactions ("[i]t would be simplifying things, but not by much, to conclude that it was paperwork that brought the South Tower down"), it was the act of enemies of the United States who will act again. I know that Langewiesche knows this; but his articles are in their way complicit in the transformation of September 11 into "September 11," which was in large part a dissociation of the event's political and strategic aspects from the event's social and emotional aspects, so that what remained was a holy day and a homily about heroism. This concentrated the American spirit, but it dispersed the American will. What we will be commemorating on September 11, after all, is the beginning of a war.

"THEY FORGET DEATH, BASIL," REmarks the wife of the hero in the Howells novel, explaining why she does not wish to move to New York, "they forget death in New York." Her husband retorts with the metropolitan philosophy: "Well, I don't know that I've ever found much advantage in remembering it." These days they forget death less easily in New York; but in truth there can be a certain dignity in forgetting death. Life must not be a long mortification. The frontier between memory and morbidity must be vigilantly policed. But if death may be usefully forgotten, it may not be usefully misremembered. A shallow mourning is a hideous thing. Or so I reflected the other day, when I came upon the perfect mourner's accessory, a Judith Leiber bag that portrays, in black crystals on white crystals, the World Trade Center. For under $4,000 evidence may be given of a broken Manhattan heart. Otherwise the terrorists will have won.

LEON WIESELTIER

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A Visit To a Core Knowledge School

Diane Ravitch is a research professor, New York University; distinguished visiting fellow, Hoover Institution; and member, Hoover's Koret Task Force on K–12 Education.

The day's festivities at PS 20 in Brooklyn began with the sixth-grade chorus singing Beethoven's "Ode to Joy," followed by Duke Ellington's classic "Take the A Train." The first-grade children—the boys wearing tricornered hats and the girls wearing white caps tied under their chins—recited a section of "Paul Revere's Ride," written, as one beaming child put it, by "William Wadsworth Longfellow."

Two radiant sixth-grade children declaimed Maya Angelou's poem "On the Pulse of Morning," which she wrote for President Clinton's inauguration. A first-grade group of twenty played violins, bowing out "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" by Mozart. Fifth graders reenacted the writing of the Declaration of Independence and hailed its significance in today's world; another group from the same grade declaimed on the historical injustices that had violated the spirit of Mr. Jefferson's great document. Third graders dramatized the tragedy of Julius Caesar, betrayed by his friends and the Roman mob.

For a moment, I had to pinch myself. This was neither a dream nor a wishful fantasy of my imagination. This was a regular elementary school in the heart of downtown Brooklyn that has adopted the Core Knowledge curriculum and that today was holding its annual Core Knowledge Fair, where the children proudly demonstrated what they had learned.

The Core Knowledge curriculum, developed by E.D. Hirsch of the University of Virginia, works on the simple principle that knowledge is powerful. The children study a coherent sequence of specific knowledge that builds year by year. Every student every year studies English, history and geography, mathematics and science, the art of many civilizations, visual arts, and music. As they showed at their fair, they dramatize what they learn through song, poetry, dance, and performance.

The walls of the school overflow with student projects about ancient Greece, ancient Rome, American history, the principles of science, and African American achievements. The children read wonderful classic literature, including O. Henry stories and Jack London novels. Many participate in band or chorus and learn to use computers.

E.D. Hirsch has consistently argued that the best way to reduce the gaps among social, economic, and racial groups in America is to provide equal access to knowledge. **The knowledge that culturally literate people need is not haphazard; it is specific, it can be identified in advance, and teachers can teach it.** That is what I saw at PS 20, where 98 percent of the children are members of a minority group. Many are from low-income homes, but no one looks poor. Instead, they look like children who are happily imbibing knowledge and making it their own.

For the past twenty years, our schools have been embroiled in endless and mean-spirited wrangling about the cultural content of the curriculum. PS 20, where the love of knowledge is so joyfully communicated by administrators, teachers, and parents, gives me hope that a new day is dawning.

— *Diane Ravitch*

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